



MARY MYLES

A Study

BY

MRS EDMONDS

AUTHOR OF

“Fair Athens” “Hesperas” “Greek Lays”

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL I

LONDON

REMINGTON & CO PUBLISHERS
HENRIETTA STREET COVENT GARDEN

1888

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TO
MY HUSBAND,
AT WHOSE REQUEST
IT WAS WRITTEN,
THIS STORY IS DEDICATED.

For the day 23 July 56 Whittle - 24.

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INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

Πασάν δ' ὑπὲρ ἥγε κάρη ἔχει ἥδε μέτωπα
·Ρέια δ' αριγνώτα πέλεται, καλαὶ δὲ τε πᾶσαι.
·Ως ἥγ' ἀμφιπόλοισι μετέπρεπε παρθένος ἀδμῆσ.
·Οδυσσεία.

Two friends were strolling by the banks of the Cam in the pleasant garden of Trinity. The one was the great classical authority of whom Oxford was so justly proud ; a man withal of a goodly presence to whose commanding figure was joined a face the thoughtful intelligence of which was tempered by a kind and genial expression, and if over his head some fifty years might possibly have already passed, they had left no trace of any abiding cares by which to mark their course. The other, although nearly two years younger, was spare in person and rather bent, not

certainly from his age, which was but forty or thereabouts, but from a habit of stooping contracted in his youth ; but his friend would sometimes assert with all the warmth of a son devoted to the Alma Mater of his choice that the dominant studies of the colleges by the Isis were more health-preserving than those which obtained the preference at the sister university, in evidence of which he deduced his own portly and erect figure in contradistinction to the lean habit of body, and the drooping shoulders of the abstruse mathematician. Very seldom could a few hours pass in the scanty opportunities afforded them of social intercourse without a lively discussion upon the superior merits of the venerable institutions to which each was loyally pledged. Playful skirmishes these, all of them, with little semblance of real combats, for the champions on either side knew full well beforehand that with weapons so equally tempered, wielded by skill as equally shared, neither to one nor the other was victory or defeat possible.

“ Well, we have beaten you now thoroughly with our new phalanx of Amazons,” cried the master of Trinity. “ You have heard of the honours gained here lately by a mere

girl, although, to be sure, I must own that she came out best in the classics.”

“I have no interest nor any curiosity whatever in respect to your female phalanx. If you reckon upon that you will sustain a crushing defeat.”

“But, I tell you, this girl’s papers were a perfect revelation as to a woman’s powers.”

“Pshaw! at what sacrifice?”

“Sacrifice?”

“Yes. I venture to say that she wears spectacles, is sallow, and —”

“And what?”

“Forgive me, friend, round-shouldered.”

(The era of the above conversation was, of course, before Newnham and Somerville Colleges were established.)

“Ah, I know—the old story; I think that I have heard you affirm that it was of no consequence if a truly beautiful woman could not write her own name.”

“The history of all time has shown that the supreme power of woman has always lain in her beauty, not in her learning.”

“Such an admirer of female loveliness as yourself should not now be a bachelor, methinks.”

“My good fellow, there is such a thing as

disillusion. I can go through life, you see, with my own dream of fair women ever with me ; but disillusion, the frequent concomitant of marriage, no, I could not risk it.”

“ You have never been in love, that is quite clear, unless in your dreams, with the white-armed Helen.”

“ Heaven forbid ! the white-armed Helen was never to my taste. Menelaus was a good fellow ; but a white-armed Helen would have deposited me in six feet of earth in no time ; and now confess, father of goodly sons and daughters, on the confines of fifty must not one give up the hopes engendered of dreams ? ”

“ You have indulged such hopes, then ? May I ask in what likeness she was to have come who could have converted a dream into a reality ? ”

“ In the likeness of another white-armed, but also a white-souled woman, the daughter of King Alkinous.”

“ Ha, ha, Nausikaa ! *Ναυσικάα λευκώλευος !* ”

The great mathematician burst out into a peal of laughter.

“ Does Oxford really give birth to such phantasies ? But come with me, I have promised to look in at a tennis party this

afternoon ; it is now almost past the time, and as I do not want to part with you lest you slip through my fingers, and I lose you for this evening, come with me ; I shall not detain you long," and he linked his arm into that of his friend.

The tennis tournament was, however, over ; it had only been a tournament of women, and most of them had left. Whilst the hostess, after her introduction to the great man, was gently reproaching her friend for his want of punctuality, the Oxford professor was attentively regarding the few girls who remained, and who, having flung down their rackets, were simply engaged in throwing and catching the balls. One of them, with arms upraised, which served to show to advantage her tall, slight, but elegantly proportioned figure, whose hat, having fallen off, left to view a wind-ruffled mass of bright-waved chestnut hair overshadowing a broad, white brow, especially rivetted his regard. As she turned her head a bright blush overspread a rather pale face at observing the presence of the two gentlemen. The contour of every feature approached nearer to the classical type than is usually seen in England, and her fine grey eyes, which, undroopingly and

with a kind of queenly composure, notwithstanding the belying glow on her cheeks, met the looks bent upon her, had a singular light in them, for which the word steadfastness, however inadequate, is the best interpretation possible.

“By heaven!” whispered the great classic, “’tis Nausikaa herself.”

“’Tis the girl who gained the honours,” said his friend. “Let me introduce you.”

CHAPTER I.

Whan shaws been sheene and shraddes full fayre,
And leaves both large and longe,
It's merrye walking in the fayre forrest
To heare the small birdes songe.

OLD BALLAD.

Things such as these are ever harbingers
To trains of peaceful images

A linnet starting all about the bushes ;
A butterfly with golden wing broad parted
Nestling a rose.

KEATS.

A LOFTY room, flooded with sunshine and redolent with the perfume of fresh flowers, books, the best of all possible garnitures, piled on the tables and smiling on the walls from every recess, drawings, musical instruments, and for a central figure a woman of surpassing grace of form, whose bright and lofty beauty was tempered by the almost singular contrast of garments severe even to

rigidity, made altogether a picture which would have arrested the most commonplace beholder. The genius of the place, who had cast the glamour of her personality on every item of this spot, appropriated to study, was now resting her elbows upon a table with folded hands, and looking athwart the volumes thereon, was gazing dreamily into the garden whence came floating through the open French windows the clear jubilant notes of a blackbird, which seemed as if his very soul must burst from excess of joy ; in that within the heart of that same thick-leaved thorn tree were his well-fledged offspring beating their open wings with impatience for their first flight. Something very like dew-drops glistened in those fine grey eyes, although Mary Myles had left the impressionable age of eighteen behind her some seven years since ; albeit, tears were ready to start at the sound of a blackbird's note, which was, indeed, like a trumpet note of recall, but brought back memories only. The lapse of nearly eight summers which bridged over the gap between girlhood and womanhood might possibly have infringed somewhat upon the first freshness of her cheek, but if Burke is right when he defines this epoch in a

woman's life as one in which if some of the bloom tints have faded, the loss is amply compensated by a look of refined sensibility, such a result was visible in a marked degree in the countenance of Mary Myles. It was an eminently beautiful face, but somehow it did not always at once strike the beholder as being so. Critical observers, who also possessed a feeling for the highest forms of Art, would pause to consider what it was that exercised almost a magnetic influence over them when they found themselves arrested in the contemplation of that unique figure occupying some shadowy corner in Mrs. Hazelhurst's drawing-room at her frequent receptions. If they were ladies and amiably disposed, they would compliment the hostess upon her taste and perception in having secured for her governess one who possessed the unusual combination of learning with grace of person, summing up their commendations with the moderate praise of, "What a very interesting face!" Those of the masculine gender, on the contrary, after the first almost startled look of surprise, would give a second glance somewhat stealthily to assure themselves of the actual presence of the highest type of womanly

beauty so unexpectedly brought before them, and would be silent, as the deepest convictions are ever slow to utter themselves.

Whenever some leader of thought, some college don or literary giant was invited, Mrs. Hazelhurst, out of the very kindness of her heart, would inwardly rejoice that she had ready at hand the very commodity that was needed ; for Mrs Hazelhurst fell into the error of believing that a superior woman would be required for the solace of a superior man, and was quite oblivious of the fact that, as a rule, learned men prefer to refresh themselves with the society of their feminine opposites rather than to be paired with the best tripos, medallist, or wrangler Girton or Newnham may ever produce.

Upon these occasions Mrs. Hazelhurst would manage to convey in whispers to the great man who was about to meet Miss Myles for the first time, what was in store for him, all unwitting of the sinking at his heart occasioned by her words. The mental friction thereby induced, however, seldom lasted until the dining-room door was reached, for he would quickly discover that the lady consigned to him, although reported to be from Girton, had a slight, elegant, and graceful figure,

and if he had an eye for Art he would realize that her garments were singularly simple and flowing, and markedly free from all meretricious ornamentation. Being encouraged to pursue his investigations, he, too, would soon perceive that she had a very interesting face, if he did not go further, and pronounce it beautiful, and in less than ten minutes he would, moreover, congratulate himself on the fact that she had a very mellow and thrillingly sweet voice, and whatever there might be behind, at any rate she was not learned in discourse.

The result of such preliminary observation having successfully cleared the air, the professor who possessed some pet theory which he was desirous of airing, would inwardly rejoice that he had at last met with a highly cultivated woman, who had no theories of her own, or who, at least, was not voluble upon them. Here, he might be imagined as reflecting, was a feminine intellect which was capable of understanding and appreciating him. The evident satisfaction to be derived from the receptivity of this superior feminine mind was not diminished by the consideration that it was accompanied by a face fair enough in its bare outline to challenge any criticism, whilst

at the same time there was a something behind which seemed to defy the power of the analyst. What was that subtle charm? more than one wise one had asked himself. Where lay that power of attraction which that quiet aspect, and those calm grey eyes appeared to veil?

Mrs. Hazelhurst had observed with some astonishment, not unmixed with pleasure, that her dear old friend, the wise, wealthy, learned, and good Dr. Grantham, behind whose name in print tripped some dozen or more letters of the alphabet, and whose eyes had always beamed upon Miss Myles with fatherly interest, whilst his manners had always shown the most marked courtesy, was at last gradually throwing off this attitude of formal respect, and was assuming one at once more familiar and tender. She remembered upon his first introduction to her governess what an earnest and inquiring look was that which he had bent upon her, and how vivid was her blush as he said, "We have surely met before?" She had noticed lately that his voice would drop almost to a confidential whisper whenever opportunity brought him to take a seat by Miss Myles's side. How annoying it was that upon the two last

occasions of a visit from him the lady in question had made some excuse for retiring early! To her absence from the drawing-room she had attributed the sudden collapse of Dr. Grantham, who had been previously unusually animated, and who afterwards remained in his customary dignified reserve for the rest of the evening.

“I do not think,” said Mrs. Hazelhurst to herself this very morning as she was closing a note to this same worthy friend of hers, “I do not think that there could possibly be a more suitable wife for him. She will never rub against any of his angles, and though they are imperceptible to most people, yet I know that he has angles,” and Mrs. Hazelhurst smiled at her own concealed jest on the rather corpulent don.

Mrs. Hazelhurst paused as she was placing this in its envelope. “I wonder that she did not marry six or seven years ago,” she again soliloquized, and with almost a feeling of pity. “She must have been very pretty—very pretty; but I suppose that she was always too quiet to take the fancy of a young man, too quiet, too fond of study, perhaps, or a thought too cold. Young men like girls with sprightliness and vivacity, with something in them, but

when middle-aged and elderly men contemplate matrimony, too lively a companion might entail many inconveniences. Advancing years require repose, and those grey eyes of hers are a promise of long life to any old bachelor who will trust himself to their influence," and Mrs. Hazelhurst smiled again over her own thoughts as she closed the envelope. "I shall be very sorry to lose her, certainly, but it will be a real benefit to both concerned when Miss Myles becomes Mrs. Grantham."

A laughing girl in the bloom of early maidenhood burst into the room at this juncture, and threw her arms impetuously around her mother's neck, crying —

"Largess ! largess !"

"What now, you madcap darling ?" said Mrs. Hazelhurst, fondly regarding her daughter's glowing face as she gently unwound her arms, and held her off with a hand on each of her shoulders. "I thought my Helen was deeply immersed in her studies, and that I was at least safe from one of her irruptions for an hour or two. What is it that brings you hither ? What new indulgence do you claim ?"

“ Ah ! you will never guess. But I will not keep you in suspense. Herbert is coming.”

“ Herbert ? ”

“ Yes, Herbert—that dear boy, Herbert. Now, are you not as glad as I am, and must I not have a holiday ? ”

“ Herbert coming at last ! Yes, I am glad, very glad.”

Mrs. Hazelhurst stooped to kiss Helen on her cheek, and her own face suddenly over-spread with a colour almost as bright as her daughter’s.

“ See, dearest mother, here is a pretty little note enclosed for you ; but cousin Herbert has owed me a letter a long while, and so you will not mind his writing to me to announce his coming, will you ? And I may have a holiday ? It would be utterly impossible to read those dry things Miss Myles is so fond of, with Herbert expected to arrive every moment. To-morrow I shall be more reasonable.”

“ As usual,” laughed her mother. “ But quiet, quiet ; let me read the short note the dear boy has vouchsafed me, and kiss your thanks when I have granted your request.”

As Mrs. Hazelhurst ran her eyes over the few lines her countenance brightened more and more.

“ Dear fellow,” she said, half to herself; “ no son could write more lovingly.” Then turning to her daughter, “ Go, darling,” she cried, gaily, “ and tell Miss Myles that she is freed to-day from her troublesome pupil, and be ready to go with me in half-an-hour. We will drive to the station to meet him. Your aunt is good enough to let us have him for three whole weeks. He has been studying hard, and needs a change. It shall not be our fault, shall it, pussy”—and the mother pinched Helen’s firm, rosy cheeks—“ if he does not enjoy himself?”

Helen Hazelhurst clapped her hands in boisterous delight, and sped swiftly on the light feet of fifteen to the room where Miss Myles was still leaning upon her elbows and the blackbird was still piping on the tree.

“ He is coming—he is coming—this very, very day! We are off to the station to meet him, and you, too, have a holiday;” and the pupil with unrepressed affection kissed her governess warmly.

“ Who is coming?” said Miss Myles, smiling, as she took a hand of Helen’s in

each of her own, and looked in her face intently.

“Why, my half-cousin, Herbert, whom I have not seen for four years. It really is too bad, for he is a real brother to me. You have often heard me speak of Herbert Langridge, and what a dear, good, darling boy he is.”

“Oh, yes ; I have often listened with great pleasure to your warm praises of your cousin. But, of course, he’s not a darling boy now, is he ? I thought that he was about to study for the Bar, so he cannot be exactly a boy.”

“Well, I believe that he is just turned twenty ; he is four years older than I am. And when he was here last he did everything that I asked him to do ; and I do not think that he has changed one bit by his letter to me, for he says he is looking forward to a return of the old days together. Not,” said Helen, laughing, “that I shall expect he will go fishing for tadpoles, or swing in the same swing, nor shall I be so wicked as to ask him to climb and rob a nest of one of its eggs for my collection. Times have changed ;” and Helen gaily tossed her head.

“ But sixteen is rather beyond the age when a boy fresh from Harrow usually fishes for tadpoles, is it not ? ” said Miss Myles, turning her clear grey eyes full upon Helen’s beaming face with an amused look.

“ You don’t understand, you prim old dear. Of course he only did it to please his little cousin, because, you see, he has no sister, and he is devoted to me whenever he has had the chance of getting here. I shall get him to tame that wild pony of mine. We shall ride out together every day. Will it not be glorious ? But I am only thinking of myself. Dear Miss Myles, what will you do ? You will not pore over books whilst I — ”

Helen paused.

“ Helen, I have been listening to a blackbird till I am thoroughly unhinged. It brought back my old home so vividly that I seem to be fit for nothing but idleness and dreams. It is well that I am free to indulge them, or you would have found me tripping for once.”

A gay peal of laughter at the bare suggestion of her governess being at fault rang out from Helen as she bounded from the room.

Half-an-hour later Mrs. Hazelhurst and

Helen were driving to the station. As the sounds of the carriage wheels died away, Miss Myles, who had stood at her chamber window waving her hand as long as they were in sight, closed the casement and threw herself into a chair.

“Free!” she said, drawing in a long breath, “Free!” and as if to realize what the full sense of freedom meant to her she took out the comb round which her thick coils of hair were gathered and shook them down somewhat impatiently. As the masses of rich wavy brown hair, which was usually held in the most rigid subjection, were loosened they tumbled in bright ripples over her shoulders.

But this did not appear quite to content the physical longings within her. These only appeared satisfied when she thrust her bared feet (and what feet they were) into the prettiest of velvet shoes, and then she laughed—yes, laughed outright—with as joyous a laugh as if she were barely sixteen instead of nearly six-and-twenty. She then flung off her stiff white collar and cuffs, and taking a book from her shelves opened the door and listened. A strange preparation for an outing.

“Prim?” she said, interrogatively, as she glanced at herself in passing the mirror; “but perhaps I had better take hat and wrap as a precaution and protection in case of a surprise.” Another subdued but musical laugh escaped her. “There, now, I shall be all right whatever may betide,” she said, as she hung her straw hat over her arm by its strings. Opening the door again, she stood listening as if irresolute. “There is no one about—no one will see me,” she half-whispered, and running swiftly down the stairs she passed out of a side-door into a winding and shaded path which led out of the garden into some shrubberies, the appearance of which showed that it was seldom trodden. Arriving at the little wicket gate which terminated it she reached the wild and picturesque slopes, dotted with clumps of trees and interspersed with brushwood and bracken, in the intervening spaces of which flourished a succession of wild plants from the wind-flowers of breezy March to the joy-giving little eyebrights and harebells that now flecked the ground with their delicate embroideries.

As the gate swung behind her, the thorough sense of unrestrained freedom brought a rush

of colour to her cheek and a brightness to her eye. As she shook back her waves of hair with the unconscious action of a young colt, which, tossing its mane, careers, innocent of bit and bridle, over the fresh pastures, she was transformed at once from a staid governess into a beautiful young woman abounding in health and spirits, to whom all conventional shackles were constitutionally hateful; but as the well-bred colt under training bears the curb and obeys its rider with a proud grace and dignified meekness unknown to, and impossible to be attained by the mere cob, so this young woman, bowing to the yoke of circumstance, could hold her high spirit in subjection with a power unattainable by the undisciplined.

She no longer walked, but bounded along in the intensity of her joyous happiness, her little white feet in their ruby-velvet shoes gleaming on the bright dew-besprinkled turf. A clump of large chestnut trees which grew on a slight mound was the point whither her light footsteps tended. Their large arms offered ample shade from the sun, which was already high in the heavens, but the branches were not too close to prevent some rays from permeating their foliage, but allowed them

to flicker and gambol on the tufted grass beneath, where they toyed first with one flower and then with another, hanging golden chains on each by turns, whilst they shifted ever and anon with the waving shadows, which the lighter boughs bore with them as they were swayed to and fro by the freshening breeze.

“Here I am safe from all intrusion,” cried the governess, as she reached the knoll; “no one ever comes here. No one seems to care for all this,” and her kindled eyes swept eagerly over the landscape before her. “Alone with you—alone with you once more!” and she stretched out her arms to the sky, to the trees, to the brightly-glowing noonday sun, as though she and they were in accord, as though they were sentient creatures whom she loved and they knew it.

Her cry of joy, however, was hushed on a sudden, and was almost merged into one of pain as her glance fell upon the ruddy velvet shoes, which were saturated with the heavy dews of the morning. Some tufts of the shade-loving wood-sorrel, peering out of the long grass, had tempted her to leave the path. She had gathered some of the umbels, which, touched by the sun’s rays, were already

drooping in her belt. What trifles are those which habitually disturb our serenity and cloud our brightest moments—a pair of soiled shoes, a fading flower! The buoyant cheerfulness, the ecstasy of a few moments since, fled before them. The shoes were Helen's gift, and the flowers—Why had she plucked them? Was it not a plant rarely found in that neighbourhood and sparse anywhere? Why had she plucked them? They were withering already, and they had not fulfilled their appointed task. In her eager glee, like a thoughtless child, she had gathered them all, and had left no pods to ripen and cast their seeds for the wistful earth to nurse and cherish. Why had she plucked them all? Was gladness always selfish?

Subdued in feeling, she slipped off Helen's pretty embroidered gifts, and laid them in the sun to dry, and, sitting down at the foot of her most favourite tree, leaned against its trunk. The “Blessed Damozel,” that exquisitely mystic poem of Rossetti's, which always chained her fancy, will not be looked at to-day. Some thoughts are for the moment in the ascendancy, which are no longer in accord with the landscape, nor the golden sunshine, not to be gladdened at the long-armed,

full-leaved chestnut trees, nor the thin-stalked harebells growing in such profusion at their base; but they are troubrous thoughts which are now uppermost, whose advent is marked by a faint little streak between the brows—thoughts full of some shadowy care, which had brought tears into her eyes as she heard the blackbird, which, in far-advanced July, was celebrating in jubilant song the unwonted blessing of a second brood, which his faithful mate had just given him in consolation for the tragical end of the little fledgelings of treacherous April. It must surely have been that letter which the morning post had brought her, and which she read again and again whilst the bright bird was pouring out his very heart in her ears, and which was nevertheless forgotten at the very first whisper of the possibility of a whole morning's communion with Nature, but had now come back to her remembrance at the sight of those delicate wild flowers dying in her girdle, and with the suggestions of future cares and responsibilities which its contents offered to her as a prize worthy of her acceptance, had dimmed that serenity which was one of her greatest attractions.

At this moment a large scarlet Admiral

moth came fluttering towards her. It hovered over her head for some seconds as if to claim her attention, as though it had a message to deliver, and the faint line between the brows faded away when at once, as if it were a creature of thought, it gaily circled round her with renewed and more lively movements in its gorgeous wings, and finally poised itself, as if for a noontide rest, upon the uppermost of the two bare feet that lay crossed on the dry herbage. It was enough. A smile illuminated her whole face, and at the sight of the trusting, lovely little creature, which, with folded wings, was now sleeping on her instep, all disquieting speculations as to a choice in life vanished in a trice. By degrees a delicious drowsiness stole over her and the lids gradually veiled the eyes that dwelt with fondness on the friendly insect, Rossetti slid from her ungloved hands, her head drooped, and she also slept.

Some ten minutes might have elapsed when a very young man, tall and handsome, with a frame well and strongly knit together, flung himself, portmanteau in hand, over the ha-ha fence some half a mile distant, and walked rapidly along the woodland path leading to the clump of chestnut trees.

“ The place is looking somewhat wilder than heretofore, and the path is almost overgrown,” he said, half aloud. “ This is what gardeners abhor as a rule : a real living bit of Nature, a wilderness, a desert, as they say. However, I shall remember the way to the house when I get to those old chestnuts, for of course they are not cut down ; my aunt is not so infatuated as to allow Stevenson to do that, Goth as he is. Ah, here they are,” he exclaimed aloud as, emerging from some thick underwood, he came suddenly upon them. “ How grand they look ! but shade of Theocritus ! a wood-nymph sleeping under their shadows ! ”

Herbert Langridge stopped bewildered, and for a moment or two paused irresolutely, debating whether he should proceed or retrace his steps. It seemed as though he were really an intruder into some sacred precinct ; but, second thoughts prevailing, he went forward, treading, however, more slowly, and even on tiptoe, so that he might be able to pass on without awakening the sleeper. There were fragments of dead boughs strewn all about which the winds of March in their anger had torn off, and which, dry and brittle as they were, crunched

and crackled under his feet, trod he ever so carefully. Who could wonder, too, that as he drew nearer he turned his head in passing to take a second look at so unwonted a sight as a woman, young and fair (for that he saw at once the sleeper undoubtedly was), sleeping at midday in a lonely place under a tree with uncovered head and flowing hair, and—yes, there was no mistake—bare feet; and what feet! Had they been the ordinary kind of feet which girls sometimes display on the sands at a neighbouring foreign watering place, it is more than probable, that, averting his gaze with disgust, Herbert would have hastened on with no very kindly thoughts to their possessor for revealing them. But those feet were as white and as perfect in form as if just cut from the marble in days gone by, when the deforming fashion of high heels and other atrocious feet-coverings of the same class were unknown. Herbert Langridge was as modest as any maiden; but he could not choose but look. Certain is it, too, that at this juncture the graceful form, the uncommon type of face, as well as those statuesque little feet, so startled him that for a moment he forgot his precautions, and treading inadvertently upon a withered

bough it snapped with so sharp a report that the sleeper slowly opened her eyes and fixed them, as if in calm unconsciousness, on the face of the young man who was so steadfastly regarding her. As their eyes met thus involuntarily Herbert felt a chill shiver run through him as the blood rushed to his face and brow. Hastily averting his head, without raising his hat, and with the faint hope that the wood-nymph, or cousin, or whatever reality the vision might afterwards assume, might think after all that she had been unobserved, he strode hurriedly and rapidly on.

Miss Myles, so suddenly awakened, forgot for some moments her loosened hair and unclothed feet. When this double consciousness arose within her she hastily gathered up her tresses into a knot and thrust her feet into the now dry slippers. As she drew her hat carefully over her brows, she for the first time turned her head in the direction which the stranger who had intruded upon her had taken. As her eyes followed the stalwart figure of the young man retreating in the distance, the fact that he must be the Herbert Langridge whose expected coming

Helen had announced that morning was self-evident.

“They will be a handsome couple,” she said to herself as she looked after him. A turn in the path hid him from sight, and when she saw him no longer she said, half-aloud, “Who could have dreamt of his coming along this tangled by-path? He must have thought that I was a hamadryad who had lost her way.”

CHAPTER II.

Whence came that high perfection of all sweetness ?

KEATS.

As with flushed brow, kindled eye, and hastened pace Herbert Langridge reached the same wicket-gate through which Miss Myles had passed some hours before, it might almost have seemed that he was hurrying from some unpleasant object rather than a graceful wood-nymph surprised sleeping ; but his body obeyed automatically the electric spark that had suddenly fired his soul.

“ *Dea certè*,” he murmured, as he slackened his speed only when his hand rested upon the gate.

Herbert Langridge was fresh from classical honours, and unwittingly and without pedantry his thoughts clothed themselves in their late most familiar garb. “ *Dea certè*,” he

repeated, as now for the first time he turned and looked back, but he saw nothing but the upland slopes, and the top branches of the chestnut trees. With a long, searching glance he sought on either side of the copse if he might catch the shadowy glimpse of a flowing robe or skimming white feet. Once, for a moment, his heart leapt into his mouth as, in good sooth, he did see a white object flitting among the ferns. Pooh! it was but a grey rabbit, and had a gleam of white merely from contrast with the brown tints of last year's bracken. Should he not retrace his steps? Perhaps after all that charming creature might turn out to be his laughter-loving cousin Helen, whom he remembered as dearly loving a prank. But the vision was all too delightful to admit of any such solution, or to be lost in a reality, even if the reality was a girl to the full as lovely as his mother's description of his young cousin, and was not in accordance with his present mood. He preferred to let his mind roam into the improbable, and his imagination careered among the wood-nymphs of whom his loved classic poets had written, and just at that moment he would have resented the approach of any disillusionive

explanation threatening to strip off the veil of his fantastic imagery, as though it were the hand of a rude satyr, stretching forth to grasp and rend away a hamadryad's vesture.

Slowly, very slowly, Herbert Langridge bent his way in the direction of the house. He was leaving, as he thought, poetry and idyllic beauty behind. Every step that he took made the late scene appear more idealistic, more mystic, and invested it by means of his highly-wrought sensibilities with every ethereal attribute that has ever been woven into the intricacies of verse.

Slowly, more slowly, did Herbert Langridge linger as he drew still nearer to his aunt's home. The glow of excitement and surprise had faded away, and he was pale and very grave; he, who with animated gestures, had been singing and whistling alternately before he had leapt the ha-ha fence. Laugh as some may in their lighter moods at spontaneity in love, it is nevertheless the healthy outcome of pure and reverent youth, when the intellect and feelings in due subjection the one to the other, listen with religious awe to every voice of Nature and of God; and Herbert Langridge was undoubtedly in love, not with Mary Myles, the

governess, whose name he had never heard, and of whose very existence he was ignorant, but with the wood-nymph asleep yonder, with loosened hair and bared feet.

Is it credible, it will be said, that any sane youth whose years have been devoted to real hard work, and whose demeanour always suggested the very reverse of a moonstruck dreamer, could on a sudden have both heart and brain so unhinged by the momentary vision of two pretty feet? Doubtful is it, however, that if the loveliest of faces ever seen on earth had been presented before the young man's eyes in the ordinary intercourse of life whether it would have raised any turmoil whatever in his breast. The mysterious is ever a great foster-mother in love. Those blue-veined, snowy feet looked hardly fit to tread the earth; and what a clear, unruffled heaven shone in those large grey eyes, which regarded him so calmly when his rough, coarse tread had awakened the sleeper. *Deu certè.*

“Pardon me, sir,” said a voice close to him, “but if, as I presume, you are Mr. Langridge, I beg to say that I have been sent to look for you. Mrs. and Miss Hazel-

hurst, who drove to the station to fetch you, have returned, and it is almost the time for luncheon. Allow me to take your portmanteau."

Giving up his bag to the servant who thus addressed him, Herbert followed mechanically.

"Then it was not my cousin," he said to himself, with a feeling of relief. "Of course not; she is but a schoolgirl."

Left alone in the dressing-room to which he had been shown, Herbert still saw the figure sleeping under the chestnut trees. "It will never be forgotten; but of course I shall never see it again." He said "it," as though he were speaking of some phantasmagoria. "It has spoilt me for all the rest of womankind." A smile and a shrug accompanied this muttered ejaculation. He was young, and had seen so few women. Those who have lived long in the world can recall not one but half-a-dozen portraitures indelibly photographed in their memories, which have flitted by in the days gone by, seen once, and never seen again.

A gentle knocking at the door snapped the magic thread that he was spinning, and kindly voices called upon his name.

“ My dear boy, are you ready ? ” “ Cousin Herbert ! luncheon.”

Opening the door hastily, he was at once locked in the arms of Mrs. Hazelhurst and Helen.

“ How did you manage to evade us, you bad boy ? ” said his aunt, regarding him fondly. “ I know you hate driving, but still, having luggage, you need not have run away from us.”

“ I did not dream, my dear aunt, that you would have taken the trouble to meet me ; and I only carried my small portmanteau. But, Helen, what is the matter with me that you look at me with such amaze ? ”

“ You have grown so big,” answered Helen, laughing and blushing.

“ And Helen, too, has grown ‘ big,’ as she calls it,” said Herbert, smiling on his handsome cousin.

“ Yes, she is almost a young woman in appearance, is she not ? But come and have some luncheon, you must be very hungry ; and we are quite alone.”

“ Quite alone,” repeated Herbert to himself as he offered his arm to his aunt.

Mrs. Hazelhurst was delighted to see her nephew, and a warm glow of pride mantled

her cheek as she beheld his fine manly form and handsome face. She had been gratified to hear of all that he had achieved at College ; but although the praises of his mother on those accounts had been gratifying, yet his personal appearance appealed more to Mrs. Hazelhurst than any honours won for his learning, and she also, looking upon him and her darling Helen as they stood side by side, mentally ejaculated, whilst her eyes kindled, “They will, indeed, be a handsome couple,” adding, however, “as handsome as they are good.”

It will be seen that Mrs. Hazelhurst was rather given to matrimonial speculation. She was a kindly woman, as has been before remarked, and it was this very kindness in her nature that led her to dwell with so much complacency upon the probable future of two people in whom, after her own daughter and nephew, she felt the greatest interest. The happiness of the two dearest ones assured, as it would undoubtedly be by their union, what better than to assist with a few amiable manipulations to secure that of her old friend and the lady whom he so evidently admired ? She thought that the difficulties which she had foreseen from the learned

proclivities of both, were under her judicious and dexterous handling disappearing, and that at this moment both the professor and the governess were as potter's clay, and only required her clever moulding to figure as the model couple of her imagination. Nor did it ever occur to her that the difficulty after all might lie not in Dr. Grantham's hesitancy, but in the lady's reluctance, for she was slow to recognize that there was some discrepancy in the ages and appearance of the learned and portly don, and her delicate-featured, bright-haired governess.

“ You have come, Herbert, at the very right time,” said his aunt, as they sat down to luncheon. “ We are likely to be quite alone, and we are under no engagements, so we shall have you all to ourselves, which will be a great delight to Helen. Dr. Grantham, with the Vicar and his wife, dine with us to-morrow; and the latter are good old friends of yours.”

“ Are not the boys at home? ”

“ Not just now. The two younger are at their uncle's, and as to Reginald—I should think that Miss Myles is not within,” she said suddenly, looking across the table, as she spoke, to a vacant seat. “ Do you know,

Helen, if it were her intention to go to the Vicarage?"

"Miss Myles does not often confide to me her intentions," replied Helen, laughing.

Herbert had noticed casually that the table was laid for four, and once or twice he had glanced towards the door, whenever it was opened, for his thoughts were still wandering away to the chestnuts and the wood-nymph.

"I tell you what it is, Herbert," cried Mrs. Hazelhurst, with emphasis, "you have been working too hard, lad; why, you are as silent and abstracted as if you were going up for an exam' to-morrow. What are you thinking of, my dear boy? Happily you will have no brain-pressure now for some time to come. By-the-bye, which way could you possibly have taken that we missed you? We were late, certainly; but we ought not to have passed you had you come by the road."

"I did not go by the road," he said, curtly, and stooped down to caress a fine St. Bernard dog which had just entered the room, and had lain down by the side of his mistress.

"What a splendid fellow this is, aunt. Whence did you procure him?"

"When you have done twining your fingers in his shaggy coat, Herbert, perhaps

you will let me have the pleasure of introducing you to Miss Myles."

Raising his head at these words from his aunt, Herbert found that the hitherto empty chair was now occupied by a lady. Each bowed in silence as Mrs. Hazelhurst fulfilled the usual formalities ; after discharging which she at once hastened to give her nephew the whole history of the "splendid fellow" he had admired.

Although as Miss Myles bent her head there was not the faintest sign of any recognition in her quiet smile, nor the slightest flush in her cheek, yet as her eyes for one moment met his there was no doubt in Herbert's mind that his wood-nymph of two hours since was before him, and actually taking luncheon. Her name had jarred upon him before he had raised his head at his aunt's reminder that another lady had joined them whilst he was caressing the dog. A feeling of angry disappointment was now predominant as he admitted to himself that the wood-nymph, his dryad of the chestnuts, and Miss Myles were one and the same personification, and yet how different ! No nymph, no dryad, met his covert gaze, but a lady whose style of dress was scrupulously

neat, and almost formal in its entire absence of ornament, and whose hair was drawn back from her low broad brow with such rigorous precision, as if an attempt on its side to show any of Nature's crisping was a sin to be strongly controlled. Was it possible that that most decorous and thoughtful-looking woman—for evidently she was more than a girl—could be that charmingly-graceful embodiment of poetry that had so stirred every fibre in his frame? Ah! Helen's governess, of course, he acknowledged pettishly.

As he listened, or pretended to listen, to his aunt, a whirl of conflicting emotions coursed through him; but little by little he found his irritation subsiding. The more he pondered upon the fact that the two—his nymph and Miss Myles—were one, the more his interest began to be awakened in the duality of impressions conveyed to his mind by one individual. That which had before been almost visionary, and when viewed by his intellect almost an unreality, and only to be approached through the imagination, was now converted into a very real and sober fact indeed. Gradually, however, his thoughts became rivetted upon this fact as represented by Miss Myles, the governess. It was not

beauty now, nor charm of person that engrossed him ; it was the something behind—the something not to be perceived that made him wonder. And whilst wondering, he strove to recall the vision of the morning wherewith to reclothe the figure before him.

“ I shall be going to the Vicarage for dinner, Mrs. Hazelhurst. Is there any message that you would wish me to bear to Mrs. Ashcroft ? ”

The low, clear tones of the speaker fell cold on Herbert’s ears. Sweet and mellow were they, in truth ; but how matter-of-fact they sounded. As she thus spoke Miss Myles rose to leave the room.

“ Nothing more than this, dear Miss Myles. Tell them that Mr. Langridge has arrived, and is going to give us the pleasure of his company for several weeks.”

Herbert Langridge had arisen from his seat with the intention of opening the door, but he hesitated somewhat confusedly ; and meanwhile Miss Myles had left the room and had closed the door after her, herself.

“ Quite the governess, is she not ? ” said Mrs. Hazelhurst, turning with a smile to Herbert ; but he saw not the smile, for, still standing, he was gazing blankly at the closed

door by which a tall, slight figure, singularly graceful in the rigid and Guido-like simplicity of her attire, had just passed out.

Helen laughed outright.

“What moves you so suddenly to laughter, Helen? You have been unusually quiet all luncheon-time until now,” said her mother.

“Why, look at cousin Herbert, my dear mother! He is quite dazed — absolutely frightened by my governess! He has been blushing and trembling ever since she came in, as if he were afraid that she would at any moment begin to question him about his studies. I suppose, like most boys—I beg your pardon, cousin—like most gentlemen, he has a wholesome dread of Girtoners. You see he dared not for his life open the door for her. But I wonder how you knew that she was a Girtoner, Herbert? Instinct, I suppose. Now, was it not instinct?”

“Hush, Helen, do not talk such nonsense. I can assure you, Herbert,” said Mrs. Hazelhurst, coaxingly, as if to reassure him, “that when you have seen a little more of Miss Myles you will like her very much; she is a superior person—a most superior person. Well, Helen, laughing again?”

“Because, mother, a ‘most superior

person' ought to be forty at least; and dear old Polly is not thirty by a long way. That I am quite sure of."

"Helen is incorrigible, and, I fear, utterly spoilt. Do you not think so, Herbert?"

But Herbert had not given a thought to Helen, except to feel annoyed at the turn the conversation had taken; the words "Girtoner," "superior person," "dear old Polly," had severally and equally stung him. He compressed his lips and was silent.

"Of course," resumed Mrs. Hazelhurst, persuasively, "you have only seen her for a few minutes, scarcely looked at her, in fact, otherwise you must have been taken with her as everybody else always is after a little time. She is considered ratter pretty, too, by some people, particularly by gentlemen."

"She is very pretty, mother, and a dear old thing—that's settled—but why could not Herbert and I walk with her to the Vicarage this afternoon and make our call? That would be very nice."

"I intend calling at the Vicarage to-morrow morning," said Herbert, abruptly, and in a dry tone.

Mrs. Hazelhurst, glancing at his heightened colour, inwardly condemned his pride—for

such she deemed it—towards so *superior a person* as Miss Myles, “but boys are all alike” she thought.

“If you will excuse me, dear aunt,” he said, in his usual equable voice, after mentally shaking down his ruffled feathers, “I should like to write a few lines to my mother that it may go by this night’s mail. Where shall I have the pleasure of rejoining you?”

“You will find us, if not just outside here, somewhere in the garden. Give both our loves and our grateful thanks;” and Mrs. Hazelhurst, nodding a kindly farewell, drew Helen’s arm within her own and led her into the verandah.

“So she, the wood-nymph, is the governess here,” said Herbert, half aloud, as weary and somewhat chafed in mood he flung himself into an easy chair. “‘Girtoner,’ ‘superior person,’ ‘dear old Polly.’” At each expression, as he repeated them in half-suppressed tones, he felt a deep shade of resentment against the speaker, as the idol worshipper’s anger is aroused by a suggestion that his idol is no divinity, but a mere clump of wood. And then, after a long pause, his irritation was aroused afresh by the name.

“Miss Myles,” he ejaculated, bitterly.

He was only a youth, and as that sound spoken by himself jarred upon his excited nerves he could almost have wept. But these objections were soon to be swept away by the force of his will. The same firm, determined, almost dogged frame of mind which never allowed him to loosen any grasp which he had once laid upon any subject was already asserting itself. The enthusiasm and poetry of his nature, which had been hidden away in his heart and kept hitherto in subjection, was not suspected by his most intimate associates; and as for his mother, she had often laughed at him for the entire absence of romance which his mental constitution exhibited. A stern look came into his eyes and he compressed his lips.

“I shall like her when I know more of her, shall I? Be it so; perhaps after all I may find my wood-nymph again under the pedantic disguise of the governess, and then—”

He smiled. The very thought that here there was a living book to be studied, and some apparent discrepancies to be explained, and one page brought into harmony with another, pleased him. Mysteries have peculiar charms for the young, especially

when they think that to them will be given the unravelling of them. He sat down at the table with cleared brow, and wrote an affectionate letter to his mother to assure her of his safe arrival. It was longer than the occasion required. He dwelt very much upon the warmth of his reception by his aunt, and how delighted he was to find them both looking so well. He even wrote at length regarding Helen's beauty and liveliness, and he did not forget to mention that there was a splendid St. Bernard's dog, and that the Vicar and his wife, as also Dr. Grantham, were coming upon the morrow to dine, that the country was looking most lovely ; but he said not a word of his encounter with a wood-nymph nor his subsequent disillusion, neither did he make mention of Miss Myles, the governess.

CHAPTER III.

Does it never occur that we, perhaps, live with people too superior to be seen, as there are musical notes too high for the scale of most ears ?

EMERSON.

WHEN Herbert Langridge joined his aunt and cousin he was apparently, to use a homely phrase, himself again, and Helen, who had begun to think him completely changed from her old champion and playmate, was soon quite reconciled to his identity with his former self, and trustful as to his capacity for being as useful to her now as in the former days.

“ We'll have our first ride this afternoon, an hour or two before dinner, Helen, if you like,” he said, blithely, “ and I'll then see what the fault really is in your pony—whether it proceeds from radical ill-temper or radical ill-treatment, which amounts to the same

thing ; that is if aunt will trust me with one of her horses.”

“ Oh, Herbert, I do not go in for spirited horses ; I can trust you with either of them, and either of them with you ; and as this is really a whole holiday for Helen upon your account, it is quite fitting that you and she should inaugurate your visit by a ride together. You will only find, I think, that her Sorrel shies a little ; there is really nothing else the matter with him. He shies when he sees anything lying on the road that annoys him, the same as Helen shies at her lessons when anything particularly difficult annoys her.”

“ But I never, never shy with dear old Polly, mother.”

Herbert rose from his seat and Mrs. Hazelhurst frowned at Helen.

“ What is the matter, my dear mother ? Is she not a dear old Polly ? ”

“ Anyone would think that you were speaking of a parrot, cousin, and not of an educated lady, as by all accounts Miss Myles appears to be.”

“ How testy he seems to be about my governess ! ” thought Helen.

“ I am sorry I shall not see Reginald this time,” he said, anxious to change the subject.

Mrs. Hazelhurst, desirous to smooth away the "Polly" familiarity of Helen, thought that she had found here her opportunity, and remarked with emphasis —

"Would you believe it that the lady of whom Helen has thus spoken, actually prepared Reginald for his matriculation—coached him, as I believe you call it? Miss Myles was governess to the boys at the Vicarage before she came here—you know they are all boys there—and when Reginald came from Rugby, where he did positively nothing, he studied with her, and his subsequent success, because he is not naturally fond of study, the Vicar always says is entirely due to her, and sorry enough the Ashcrofts were when she persisted in leaving just before Reginald went up for his scholarship, and equally glad, you may be sure, was I to be able to acquire her services. The other boys were then sent to Rugby. Mr. and Mrs. Ashcroft are both very fond of her, they seem to love her as dearly as if she were their own daughter, but I think, although it may seem absurd to say so, that Reginald and she must have had some little tiff over their readings together, for she makes a point never to go over to the Vicarage when

he is at home, and he never calls here either."

"Reginald is about a year older than myself, I think?"

"Oh, yes, he is nearly two years your senior, he is twenty-two, but really Herbert you look the elder by several years."

Herbert Langridge made no remark; he was mentally calculating how old Reginald Ashcroft would have been at the time of the coaching. "Umph," he thought, "about eighteen, and Miss Myles, who might, perhaps, be five-and-twenty now, was then a girl in her twenty-first year." A thrill of something very akin to jealousy coursed through him as a picture was suddenly presented to him of the fair-haired, good-looking Reginald Ashcroft sitting day after day by the side of his beautiful teacher and looking into her limpid grey eyes; perhaps occasionally whilst passing a book he might accidentally touch her hand, or, worse still, his awkward great foot—he remembered that Reginald had large feet)—might blunder against—

"Coached him," he growled.

"Well, he was but a boy, Herbert, and you need not look so indignant, for nowadays, since ladies take degrees, it is not considered

at all out of the way, really it is not," and Mrs. Hazelhurst smiled at her nephew's look of disapprobation.

Herbert at this moment bethought him of the promised ride, and proposed that it should no longer be adjourned, to which Helen gaily assented.

"Look ! look !" cried Helen to her companion, as the handsome pair cantered out of a side lane into the open road. "Look, there she is ; let us gallop after her."

"Who do you mean ?" said Herbert, checking his horse instead of obeying his cousin's injunctions.

"Why, Miss Myles. Do you not see her, Herbert, there just in front ? Let us get up to her before she reaches the stile ; she must cross that stile on the left in order to go to the Vicarage. Whatever are you stopping for, Herbert ?" she exclaimed, impatiently.

"To allow Miss Myles time to get over the stile," and Herbert held in his horse and waited.

Helen Hazelhurst held in her pony also, at first laughing, but noticing the rigidly grave face of her companion, she became herself on the instant as serious as her lively tempera-

ment and her barely sixteen summers permitted.

“How much longer are we to stay here? Miss Myles has disappeared over the stile many minutes ago,” she at last said to her absorbed cousin.

They went on again in silence at a walking pace, and passed the stile. Helen was a little cross, and turned her head resolutely the other way as they rode past the gap, whilst her cousin, with a stolidly grave aspect, looked straight along the road, and Mary Myles, only a few yards distant, in happy unconsciousness of their proximity, was clambering up the side of the hedgerow, and with childlike delight plucking profuse clusters of travellers’ joy wherewith to fill the basket which hung upon her arm.

After a few moments of awkward silence, Herbert Langridge devoted himself to his cousin with so much assiduity that the girl’s spirits soon recovered their wonted exuberance. Her merry laugh rang on the breeze as her companion rallied her upon her spirited and vicious pony, for Sorrel, as if he had heard the injurious remarks which had been made that morning upon himself, seemed determined to justify himself by not shying

once for the benefit of Mr. Langridge, who, looking upon his cousin's glowing face with its Hebe-like youthful beauty, involuntarily echoed his mother's opinion that Helen promised to become one of the most lovely of women. To this passing tribute of admiration he joined his approval of her as a horsewoman, for though Sorrel was not calculated to draw much upon her equitant resources, Herbert could not fail to observe how light and erect was her carriage, whether at the trot, canter, or gallop.

At dinner they were alone, as had been previously arranged, and Mrs. Hazelhurst was as much interested as her daughter at the lively description her nephew gave of his life at college, and, warming up under the encouragement of two listeners, as attentive and pleased as even his own dear mother ever was, he entered with much ardour into all those little personal details of his daily life which have always a special charm to a man's feminine belongings.

“The poor boy was tired this morning,” said Mrs. Hazelhurst to herself, as she listened to him with beaming smiles; “his ride with Helen has already done him a world of good.”

Alone that night in his chamber the thoughts of the young man rebounded with tenfold force to the morning scene at the chestnuts. It seemed so long ago ; luncheon and dinner, and talk upon the most vapid of subjects—for so he now deemed the conversation which had given so much satisfaction to his aunt and cousin—had all come between that vision and the present moment. He opened his casement and looked out into the clouded and silent night, but not even his most ardent longings could pretend to see the tops of those chestnut trees for which his eyes strained out into the darkness. The wind blew damp-laden and chilly. Herbert closed the casement, and sitting down began deliberately to analyze those emotions which were so novel and strange to him. Why was he so disturbed ? It was a pretty little picture, that scene of the morning—a charming idyll, as he had repeated to himself over and over again—but it was past, and had lapsed into a very prosaic reality. He laughed a little satiric laugh as he recalled his nymph transformed into a governess of an astonishingly staid demeanour. Had he met her for the first time at luncheon would she now have occupied his thoughts ? Would

he not have listened placidly to his aunt's commendations of her worth, and laughed perhaps at his cousin's sallies, and afterwards, at this very moment, would he not have forgotten that such a person as Mary Myles existed? And yet, merely because of the evanescent situation which had clothed her with so much romance and beauty—because of that only—was he impelled to this continual absorption of his thoughts upon one who was only as an actor in a little drama. It was very strange, he repeated, that this Miss Myles should continue to haunt his memory.

Herbert Langridge had been a thoughtful and a hard-working youth; he had never been betrayed into any frivolities, and he had sometimes, when questioning himself as to whether his college companions were right in their estimate of his character, been almost compelled to confess that he was deficient in the graces of life—had no poetry in his constitution. This recent experience was, on the whole, not an unwelcome revelation. He was glad to find that he had a being that was capable of responding to the calls of the imagination or the fancy, and that he was not a mere machine for intellectual work alone. “There is no fear that I shall ever be carried

away by impulse; the danger was of a different nature. I shall see her again to-morrow, and possibly I may have some conversation with her, and perhaps I may be able to unravel which is her real and which her assumed character, unless she turns out to be a specimen of duality, but anyhow, it was a pretty picture not easily forgotten.” And Herbert, who had just been congratulating himself upon the discovery of a romantic vein in his being, seemed suddenly to return to his ordinary methods of thought, and threw himself down to sleep with a light and careless mood, and not once did dream of hamadryad or nymph come to disturb his repose.

And whilst Herbert had apparently just made up his mind to subject Miss Myles to an analysis upon the very first opportunity, she, at not much more than a hundred yards distance, was disquieting herself about the loss of a book. Where was her dear-loved Rossetti? She had been searching for it for an hour or more, but it was not to be found. Had she left it on the bank beneath the chestnuts when she was startled out of her foolish slumber at noonday? Dissatisfied and annoyed as she was at the whole of that episode of the

morning, it was not without a smile that she now recalled it.

“A discreet young man,” she said, as she remembered the bow with no show of recognition in his countenance when Mrs. Hazelhurst introduced her, “and he will find me discreet enough in the future, but I must go and seek my Rossetti at the chestnuts some time to-morrow.”

Dr. Grantham at the same time was sitting in his well-appointed library. It was a fine room, with good old carved oak panellings and choice heraldic escutcheons, for Dr. Grantham was proud of his ancestry and had a secret joy in beholding these silent memorials of his race in the many hours which he passed in this room alone, but not lonely. Notwithstanding that a large china bowl on a table, filled to the brim with gorgeous roses, testified to its being summer’s prime, yet on the wide hearth logs were crackling as they lay athwart the worked iron dogs, and a cloud of sparks were flying up the broad chimney. No matter how hotly burned the July’s sun, when once it had dipped to the horizon the fire was bade to flame in this beloved library. Although this custom was by many deemed injudicious as

being prejudicial to his volumes, yet in appearance nothing could be more enjoyable than this. The magnificent array of the best books of every age, which is the most soul-contenting and most perfect decoration any room can have, was not here alone. The ruddy light gleamed upon some choice specimens of armour on the walls. There were a few original and valuable paintings, chiefly portraits, and here and there, only sparsely introduced, some vases for the sake of colour. The Indian carpet was thick and soft, the chairs were very easy. Altogether the on-look was one of quiet, almost luxurious repose, where the solid aspects of comfort there presented suggested that study in those precincts would bring no weariness to the bones, and the unbidden thought would often arise in the breast of a studious friend when looking around that not here—not with these surroundings—did Dr. Grantham earn his reputation for learning.

No, truly this was a sanctuary of rest after work. Dr. Grantham had been a worker. He was now in the fulness of his fifty-five years resting from his labours. Everything spoke of wealth in the widest, the broadest

sense, in which the word is capable of being applied.

Dr. Grantham was neither reading nor writing. He never read now after ten p.m., and the midnight lamp that for many years had seen him poring assiduously over many a massive volume now only glimmered faintly on most nights to witness his disrobing. Dr. Grantham was, however, deep in thought. He was weighing with logical precision the advantages and possible disadvantages that might accrue from a measure which had of late occupied much more of his attention than his books, and which this night had reached almost to a firm and settled resolve.

“Anyhow,” he said, “I shall see her again to-morrow, and then I suppose I shall at last arrive at a final determination—whether it is to be yea or nay,” and Dr. Grantham, as he took up his lamp to retire for the night, smiled as if quite content with the result either way, and, as he closed the door of his library, murmured softly to himself, “Nausikaa.”

CHAPTER IV.

I met a lady in the meads
Full beautiful.

KEATS.

MRS. HAZELHURST and her nephew breakfasted alone, and lingered long over the meal, the aunt being that morning an attentive and eager listener, whilst the young man recounted again his college experiences, mingled with affectionate discourse about his mother, whom Mrs. Hazelhurst tenderly loved, for between the step-sisters there had never existed aught but mutual confidence and warm regard. Mrs. Langridge had been left a widow early, but notwithstanding that her youth, her great personal attractions, and her absolute power over her small property, with but one child, and that a boy, had drawn many most eligible offers of marriage,

she had rejected every proposal with the utmost decision, and had devoted her whole future life, herself, and her all to her child and his education. Full of pride in the growing boy and his manifest intelligence, she nursed anew in secret joy all those ambitious dreams which the death of her husband had so prematurely annihilated. Year by year her hopes in a second brighter future seemed to be justified—a future in which she was still to reign and to be the most prominent figure. Without any hesitation she destined her little son from the first to the Bar ; that he would make a career such as had opened out before his father she never doubted. “It will be the same name,” she would say, “and in his success all the sad past and my widowed youth will be obliterated.” As her loving eyes in these later years had dwelt with fond pride upon a face and figure which brought vividly before her the great loss of her girlhood, a thought not altogether cloudless would arise side by side with those which made her cheeks glow with delight. She was a haughty, jealous-minded woman notwithstanding her capabilities for devoted love. With no very pleasurable feelings, therefore, did she regard that event which,

happening sooner or later, would sap her sovereignty, and would relegate her to a second place in her son's heart. He would marry, of course; she would not wish it otherwise, but already she looked forward to that event with dread. To abdicate her legitimate influence when her Herbert had achieved a brilliant position through her long sacrifice, and to surrender all to some young and scornful beauty who would resent any prolongation of the mother's rightful sway, was hardly to be borne even in thought. For this reason she had inclined to and fostered her sister's project of a union between their children. Helen would bring at least the affection of a niece, accustomed from childhood to regard her aunt with reverence. She would not appear to her in any changed light when she became her mother-in-law. Helen would have a large fortune of her own, being, in fact, almost an heiress, and she had not a grain of imperiousness nor self-seeking in her character, which Mrs. Langridge saw would be most desirable in her daughter-in-law; moreover, she was bright, intelligent, and promised to be very handsome; and so summing up the personal qualifications of the boy and girl who were thus disposed of by

their parents, Mrs. Langridge herself thought
“They will be a handsome couple.”

As she dwelt upon this theme her heart would soften, and tears would come into her eyes as she recalled the very handsome couple of some twenty years since, one of whom for nineteen long years had lain in the grave of his forefathers in Kirston church-yard. This aforesought of marriage was, however, never hinted at to the two most nearly concerned.

The two mothers had wisely determined to keep it a secret, and to manage that the young people should meet just often enough to inspire a growing appreciation of each other, but not enough to dull the possibility of love by familiar intercourse. Neither Mrs. Hazelhurst nor Mrs. Langridge contemplated coercing their children's affections even by the counsel of words, but they had a strong belief that they would be able to manage matters so skilfully that when the hour came the desired affection would spring up spontaneously.

“Your Helen is growing very lovely,” Mrs. Langridge would sometimes say to her sister, “but beautiful things when constantly before us lose their power of charming. My

boy must not be distracted from his career by any precocious falling in love, or, what would be still more pernicious to our views, a boy and girl flirtation, which undermines everything that is lofty in the character. For this reason I cannot allow Herbert to go very often to Sunnyside."

These words Mrs. Langridge had written to her step-sister in the letter which had announced that Herbert, after an interval of four years, was to be permitted to visit his aunt and cousin at last.

Mrs. Hazelhurst coloured with momentary annoyance as she read those words, and in her answer remarked, "You forget, dear Elinor, that Helen is still in the schoolroom. When Herbert came last I think she had only just left the nursery. If a gap of four years is always to intervene between these visits I think it is just possible that in the interim, something may occur for which neither yourself nor I am prepared. I quite agree with you that it is quite as well that they should not be too much together whilst they are so young, but still I can hardly think that a week once or twice in every year would be dangerous to either;" but Mrs. Hazelhurst was of a more pliant and yielding nature

than her sister, and she received with wonderful gratitude the precious boon so long sought and so tardily given of this present visit of her nephew.

“Now, Herbert,” said Mrs. Hazelhurst, “I give you entire freedom to-day. Helen is at her studies, and I have some business to transact with the school and cottages; so perhaps you will like to go over to the Vicarage to luncheon, only remembering that our dinner hour is seven, and that Dr. Grantham dines with us to-day as well as Mr. and Mrs. Ashcroft.”

“Thank you very much, my dear aunt; I shall enjoy exceedingly a chat with the good Vicar and his kind wife. They will find me a little changed since I was here before, but I suppose they are just the same hospitable, indulgent pair now as then. I do think it was a good thing for Reginald when —” but suddenly interrupting himself he added, “I shall take a stroll afterwards, aunt, and seek out all my old haunts, but I shall be sure to be punctual for dinner, because of the portentous Dr. Grantham, who I hear from Helen is always served to a quarter of a second.”

The Vicar had taken his degree at St.

John's, so the two Oxford men had much to compare and talk about. Themes of much grave interest to each other made brilliant by lively anecdote, were mingled with those mutual experiences between which lay a gap of some thirty years.

"I feel, dear Mrs. Ashcroft," said Herbert, at last taking advantage of a slight pause, "that I have been very selfish in absorbing all the conversation; but although I have done so in outward seeming, my inner thoughts have all the time not been quite withdrawn from yourself. That could hardly be, when my eyes were constantly dwelling upon your tasteful grouping of the lovely wild flowers and grasses with which your table is so profusely decorated."

"You must not give me the credit of that, Herbert. That has all been done by Miss Myles, who is always bringing us baskets of her own gathering. Of course at your aunt's there is a regular staff of gardeners, and plenty of choice flowers, so that the artistic talent which she undoubtedly possesses for arranging a table has no scope there, for I believe that Mr. Stevenson, the head gardener, after the manner of his race, would greatly resent any interference, as he would

call it, with his own floral designs, and which, between ourselves, I presume to characterize as stiff and formal."

"What a sweet woman she is, is she not?" said the Vicar, suddenly turning to Herbert.

A thought similar to *la veuve Scarron* again, rushed to Herbert's mind, but he merely said —

"I have hardly spoken to Miss Myles as yet."

"Then there is a poem that you have not read!" cried the Vicar.

It had been Herbert Langridge's intention upon leaving the Vicarage to have taken a long walk far into the country, but instead of following out his morning resolution he wandered slowly homewards, but, strange to say, in the direction of the chestnuts. Praise when genuine, and when bestowed with no latent motive, is a pleasing corroborative of the justice of one's choice in love.

Poor Mrs. Ashcroft, and the Vicar, in his usual rather exalted phraseology, had no suspicion how deep their words had sunk into their young guest's heart. Annoyed with himself at finding that the name of his

cousin's governess agitated him at the very time when he thought he had schooled himself into indifference, he walked through the long grass he had strode over the day before, with feelings, however, quite the reverse to those which his wood-nymph had inspired. Then he was bright and joyous as one who has just looked on beauty as seen in some passing vision ; now he was troubled. The vision had become a reality, and he was angry and impatient, for the truth forced itself upon him that he was in love.

He was on that same spot again. A thousand flowers since yesterday seemed to have rushed into existence, so quickly does life burst into bloom in warm July. The ground was sown thick with delicate harebells, and he knew that at every step the tender little blossoms were trodden under his feet.

“ She loves these pretty wildlings,” he said, and subdued by their influence he stooped and gathered a bunch, when the sight of a book lying on the grass arrested his attention. He knew at once that it had been dropped by her, and he hastily picked it up. “ Rossetti’s Poems.” Herbert had never read a line of Rossetti, and, in fact, knew very little of any English poet. The book opened at “ The

Blessed Damozel," the place being marked by a letter—a letter not enclosed in an envelope, and evidently not of recent date. Herbert quickly closed the book, but not before two or three words of the most impassioned nature had caught his eye. "My own dear girl, my Amy, my glorious one, my darling!"

Herbert closed the book hastily, and his cheek paled. The blurred handwriting of those few words was not in the left to right characters affected by his old playmate, whose name yesterday, in conjunction with the lady who had successfully coached him, had caused for a moment or two such a thrill of jealous pain. He would not give one other glance to certify himself upon that point. The book should be sacred for him; but as he clutched the volume tightly he stood rooted to the spot. One more look—one only look—to recall all the scene of yesterday, which would henceforth be but a pleasing memory—a picture photographed in his soul. He would give the volume into her own hands, and then—why, then he would avoid her as much as possible during his stay at his aunt's, and he would limit his visit to two weeks only. The lady was too attractive not to have had—and then recoiling with innate delicacy

from the half-formed thought, he suddenly checked the rising words with indignation at himself.

As he stooped to pick up the book he had let fall his handful of harebells. They were lying almost on the same turf where those little white feet had lain yesterday. He knelt down and gathered them all carefully up, and as he rose he was about to thrust them into his vest, when he heard a light, quick step coming from behind the trees, and turning round Miss Myles stood before him.

In her simple blue cotton gown, merely confined at the waist with a ribbon, and her plain straw hat, with cheeks glowing from exercise, and her hair blown across her brow, Miss Myles had no trace of precision in her appearance.

For a few seconds they both regarded each other in silence, whilst a flush as deep as that which the warm sun and her hasty pace had spread over the face of Mary Myles mounted to the very roots of Herbert's crisp, curly hair. The first who spoke was Miss Myles.

“I came to look for a book, Mr. Langridge,” she said, almost timidly, as if some

excuse was actually needed for being on that spot, and with a blush that heightened her colour still more.

“I had only just found it, Miss Myles, and—and—I thought it must be yours,” stammered Herbert.

Mary took it from his extended hand. Neither had greeted the other. Herbert, with book in one hand and his harebells in the other, had not been able even to raise his hat—if he had remembered to do so, which he did not.

“It only wants half-an-hour or a little more to dinner-time, and that is why I am in this state. I actually scampered here,” said Mary, apologetically. “You must excuse it.”

The unaffected almost girlishness of her manner reassured Herbert, and he smiled as he said —

“What have I to excuse, Miss Myles?”

“My untutorial and blowsed appearance,” she said; “but another night in the dews would have spoilt my ‘Rossetti,’ so I ran almost all the way, and now I must hasten back. Good afternoon, Mr. Langridge, and I thank you very much.”

When Mary smiled every feature was

irradiated, and she smiled as she uttered those words.

“I, also, must return at once, Miss Myles, and unless you wish to run very fast back, and I am quite unable to keep up with you, we will walk to the house together if you will allow me to accompany you?”

A laugh, a bright natural laugh, was the answer.

With a graceful inclination of the head, she added —

“I shall not run a race with you, Mr. Langridge.”

“Permit me to have the honour of carrying your beloved ‘Rossetti.’”

“Thank you; stay,” she said, withholding it for a moment, and opening it she took out the faded letter and placed it carefully in the folds of her gown quite unconscious of the change that passed over the face of her companion.

Drawing her hat over her eyes with both her ungloved hands, she said —

“Although we are not intending to run a race, Mr. Langridge, we must walk quickly.”

“Do you like ‘Rossetti,’ Mr. Langridge?” she asked, after they had gone on a few yards side by side without speaking.

“I never read a line of his.”

“You have never read ‘The Blessed Damozel?’”

“I never even heard of the young lady,” he answered, smiling.

“Do not laugh, Mr. Langridge.”

“Why, is it so very serious?” said Herbert.

“You are not a jester as most of the young men of to-day are, and you will find no matter for jesting in ‘The Blessed Damozel.’ I will repeat just the first lines—if you do not mind, and then—if you laugh—”

“What then?”

“Why, then I have misjudged you, that is all,” she said, gravely. “But listen,” and she stopped—

“The blessed damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven;
Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even;
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven.

“Her robe ungirt from clasp to hem,
No wrought flowers did adorn,
But a white rose of Mary’s gift,—”

She paused.

“Go on, go on,” cried Herbert, and his looks were fixed with rapture on her face.

But she saw it not, or if she saw it, she thought it was all due to "Rossetti," and as she repeated the verses that followed, her voice, which was at once clear and mellow, seemed to vibrate in unison with the poet's mystic feelings, till she came to the words —

"And the souls mounting up to God
Went by her like thin flames."

"I can no more, I can no more," she broke in with, scarcely above her breath, as she stopped suddenly in her recital, and stood motionless before him, whilst Herbert found no words to say, for he saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

"We have forgotten all about the time," she resumed, after the pause of a few seconds, "so I think that if you will excuse me, Mr. Langridge, I will run down this side path, which is a shorter way to the house, past the servants' offices."

Herbert took this for a dismissal.

"Will you accept these harebells, Miss Myles?" he said, hesitatingly, as he gave her book into her hand.

"But did you not gather them for yourself, Mr. Langridge?" she asked, looking at him from under her hat.

"I was not thinking of myself when I gathered them."

"But you did not gather them for me?" she said, quite innocently.

"I was thinking of you when I gathered them," he answered, faltering as he spoke.

A deeper gravity came over her, the natural unconscious manner fled in an instant. With the self-possession and reticent demeanour of Miss Myles the governess, she bowed.

"You are very kind, Mr. Langridge," she said, very quietly, "and I thank you for them; they are favourite flowers of mine," and she turned down the side path, but she did not run, but walked rather slowly away.

"Only a quarter of an hour to dress in," she cried, as she threw herself into a chair upon reaching her dressing room; "not a second of time to waste upon this refractory hair to bring it into subjection, so it must have its own way for once." It was with something like a glance of approval that with a few touches of the comb she left it to its own natural ripples. She had laid out a sober grey silk gown to wear; she now looked from that to the harebells. "No, they will not go well together," she said,

decisively, “and these harebells I *must* wear—*thinking of me when he plucked them*—another boy!” and the thoughts of the governess went back for a moment to her former pupil—fair-haired Reginald Ashcroft.

Miss Myles coming forth from her room met Helen Hazelhurst running towards her, holding in her hand a choice spray of stephanotis. Helen stopped suddenly.

“Why, you dear old Polly, how beautiful you look! I plucked the loveliest cluster I could find with my own hands, despite Stevenson and his grim face. I thought stephanotis would go so well with your dark grey silk, but as you are, you are superb.”

“Put your precious flowers in some water, and leave them in my room, darling. I will wear them to-morrow.”

Helen stood on the top of the staircase and watched her as her white filmy gown of fine Indian muslin floated down the stairs.

“Bluebells,” she said to herself—“bluebells! Then does she actually mean to take old Dr. Grantham?”

CHAPTER V.

What private heavens can we not open by yielding to all the suggestions of rich music!

EMERSON.

As Dr. Grantham led Miss Myles in to dinner he felt a proud and happy man. His look of pleased surprise at the radiant appearance of the governess as she entered the drawing-room had been shared by each member of the group therein assembled. How charming was the contrast made by the bunch of blue harebells with those masses of curly bright brown hair which to-day had not been brought into the subjection of tightly compressed braids! And was it the consciousness that she looked well in a garb less severe than usual that had brought that delicate glow into her usually rather pale but clear cheek? Possibly, for Mary was but a mortal

woman after all. If beauty cannot altogether be obscured by the vagaries of fashion, it can undoubtedly be greatly enhanced by graceful combinations of colour and form, where Art, in all its true simplicity, reigns supreme. Mary Myles's gown of soft, creamy Indian muslin, both in the extreme fineness of its texture, and in the folds which seemed to fall at once as an artist would have wished to arrange them, was the very perfection of Art—yet of Guido's.

The artistic instinct, like the poetic, is intuitive. Mary Myles had both, but they were not brought forward to be paraded. She held them back rather with so tight a rein that no one had any ken of the little flame that burnt so steadfastly in the inner recesses of her being—a veritable spark, nevertheless, from the divine fire of inspiration. Alas ! life here is so short that not one fraction of the powers lent to us can be perfected before the material frame begins to crumble away, and the final development must necessarily be adjourned to another state of existence. Mary Myles was considered to be a learned lady, a lady who was versed in classic lore—but who had taste, and there it ended ; who, whether man or

woman, had ever looked into that holy of holies of her deeper nature before which hung the heavy veil of her restrained personality?

How swiftly did the mere clothing of the woman at his side sweep far away all the professor's intentions of carefully sounding the mind of the governess before he committed himself to a proposal. His fifty-five years did not blind him to the fact that in the matrimonial market he was very eligible. No man, however diffident, who happens to possess wealth or social position, can be long unconscious of the rather painful truth that there are always a number of fair young girls quite willing to ally themselves with men of fifty or sixty, or even with such who are beyond that borderland of old age, who can offer homes of luxurious ease. Not a high type of feminine character truly, but nevertheless in the majority of cases fulfilling with sufficient decorum the position acquired by selfish calculations. Dr. Grantham, however, was not a man who could be content to sacrifice his liberty for such negations. He had lived long enough alone to be able to value to the full his literary treasures, and the peace by which he was able to enjoy them. If a mistress were brought to Braemar she

must be able to sympathize with his pursuits; he had no idea of giving up a certain good for an uncertain advantage; the lady must therefore have a cultivated mind. But that was only one item, and not the chief. A woman without grace and beauty, had she been as wise as Athene, would be as the waters of Marah to him. And, above all, she must be able to satisfy the longings of his heart; for Dr. Grantham had strong affections, and shuddered at the bare suggestion of himself being part of a plan of expediency. The extreme caution which this habit of mind engendered, had counteracted the effect of that strong admiration which only one woman had ever aroused in him, and checked, though with no small cost, the first strong impulses which one look from her had awakened. He had torn himself away from that presence, but had never forgotten it, and often in the library of Braemar that graceful figure with uplifted arms came between him and the classic page before him.

And he had met her again in far less romantic surroundings, and for a long time was pained and sorry that the poetic figure was gone, and that only Mary Myles, the governess, was left to him after all his

dreams. Mary Myles, and Nausikaa no more. Then slowly he woke to the fact that this Mary Myles was most gifted, most truthful, and most fair, although she no longer brought back the image of King Alkinous' daughter; but was she not as cold as that Athene of whom she now reminded him? Silent and calm as a statue, when it was his chance to be in her company, how could he contemplate life with so unmoved a companion at his side? His books would then be more eloquent and heart-satisfying.

Sometimes a momentary flash of a quickly passing emotion led the observant scholar to suspect that this outer calmness was not the whole nature, and then he would muse over a possibility that sometimes dawned in consequence. He had seen a radiant look of affection rest upon her pupil. If, then, there was a spring of love hidden away, and if it were placid water on the surface only, could it be possible that that self-enclosed heart could be touched by him? At this sometime thought Dr. Grantham would feel his brain whirl, and a strange sensation at his heart. His caution would, however, bring him back to more sobered thoughts; he must not ask too much. A gentle ray of love would suffice

to light up and cheer the autumn of his days. He must not, dare not, seek for that passionate devotion which is due to youth alone. A man of his age ought to shrink from the turmoils of the divine passion ; but yet he must be assured that some flicker of love could be kindled for him in that quiet breast, or Mary Myles was not for him. He would make some test by which to gauge her feelings towards him, and if it failed—well, there would be grief and disappointment, but he had his library.

And what was the test that was to disclose the mind of Mary Myles ? Dr. Grant-ham, like many learned men, was childlike in his simplicity in many respects. He knew that Miss Myles had a sweet, mellow voice, and sang with taste, but hitherto he had only heard her sing classical music of a severe type.

He would ask her this evening to sing “The Blue Bells of Scotland.”

The woman to whom this test is to be applied is on his arm, her soft muslin skirts are almost clinging to him ; the room seems to whirl around, a sudden giddiness seizes him, and the arm upon which her hand lightly rests is trembling, for he sees for the

first time that she wears at her throat a bunch of harebells.

“Are you unwell, Dr. Grantham?” said a soft voice, as she raised her eyes and looked at him.

“Quite well, quite well; forgive me,” he whispered hurriedly, as with his other hand he drew hers tenderly farther on his arm.

They took their places in silence, and if, as Mary thought, Dr. Grantham had felt a momentary indisposition (possibly, as she surmised, from over-study the night before), it seemed to vanish immediately after a slight draught of hock which he took at the earliest opportunity.

“Miss Myles,” he said, lowering his voice, whilst he regarded her with a look of deep emotion, “I love my country, and the little flower that you are wearing is dearer to me than the choicest flowers of the conservatory. It is a singular coincidence,” and his voice trembled, “but I had intended to ask of you this evening a great favour in connection with that little cluster of memories from my native heaths.”

“Dear old man,” thought Miss Myles, as he paused. “There is no favour Dr. Grant-

ham can ask that I will not grant," she said, softly.

"Is not that rather a rash speech, Miss Myles?" and his voice sank almost to a whisper.

"Not to Dr. Grantham," she answered, and smiled.

"Well, then, I was intending to ask you to sing to me 'The Blue Bells of Scotland,' that is all."

"I will sing that, and any other Scotch song you like; I think I know them almost all."

Dr. Grantham looked at her fixedly. She was unconscious of his searching glance as at that moment the Vicar had addressed her. Dr. Grantham was satisfied. For a moment he had thought this unusual frankness was not natural, but her ingenuousness was apparent.

"Have you ever been in Scotland, Miss Myles?"

"Never, Dr. Grantham; I am longing to go."

"You shall not long much longer," said Dr. Grantham to himself.

"Dr. Grantham," cried the Vicar, good-humouredly, "we cannot let you absorb Miss

Myles entirely, nor can we allow you to be absorbed by her. I have been wanting to address some observations to you for the last ten minutes, but your head, like the sun-flower's, has always been turned to its god."

Mr. Ashcroft was not witty, but he thought he had some gift that way; and Dr. Grantham, who at this moment was exceedingly elated, smiled as he bowed and said —

"I am entirely at your service, my dear friend."

Dr. Grantham now engaging in a conversation with the Vicar left Mary free. She looked across the table to where Herbert Langridge, who had taken in Mrs. Ashcroft, sat, and their eyes met. The expression in them, and also in that of the whole frank and manly face that was fully turned upon hers, startled her, and the remembrance that it was he who had given her the harebells that she was wearing suddenly flashed upon her, and simultaneously she recalled his words: "I was thinking of you when I gathered them."

All the low-voiced, tender allusions of Dr. Grantham to the flower had fallen upon her ears unheeded. It was quite natural that he—a Scotchman—should have an affection

for the bonny little bloom; but the face opposite told another tale. Mary tried to look quite cold and indifferent as her eyes slowly wandered from that ardent gaze to the meek face of Mrs. Ashcroft; but try as much as she might to appear abstracted she felt the unwonted indications which presage what is called blushing. Nothing can repress the tell-tale blood when it once begins to surge. Mary's lip curled as if in proud indignation at herself. She held her head erect, and commanded her eyes to be steadfast and not weakly droop their lids, whilst her whole cheek and forehead were suffused with a crimson glow. Her haughty attitude endeavoured to express how utterly she repudiated this action of her blood. What cause had she to blush—to show such weakness, she who was so strong, who was mistress of herself?

Mrs. Hazelhurst saw it with much complacency, and interpreting it after her own fashion smiled discreetly to Mrs. Ashcroft. Herbert Langridge saw it, and his own face reflected a still deeper flush; but it was unobserved, as he took that opportunity to stoop down and pick up a flower which had fallen.

When Dr. Grantham turned again to address an observation to Miss Myles he did not fail to observe the irradiation and unusual expression of her face ; and the heart of the old man gave a sudden lunge.

The conversation now becoming general upon the light topics of the day, and upon matters of local interest, Mary was able by degrees to lapse into her usual quiet attitude, and no observation being expected from her she became silent, according to her wont, and shortly after the ladies retired.

“ A song without words,” said the Vicar, as the door closed on Mary’s filmy gown.

He addressed this remark to Dr. Grantham, who replied, slowly —

“ Yes ; but words which are without song, without melody or harmony, are the harshest discords.”

“ When you were down here before, Herbert, was not Miss Myles coaching my boy ? ”

“ I never saw Miss Myles until yesterday.”

“ Then how long is it since you were here, Herbert ? ”

“ Somewhere about four years and nine months.”

“ Ah ! then Miss Myles came to us about

three months after that. We had only engaged her to teach the youngsters, but it struck me after a week or two that Reginald would get on better with her than with me, for he did nothing at Rugby—a lazy fellow—as you know. Well, Miss Myles worked nothing less than a miracle with the boy; but she would not stay with us after he went up for the scholarship. Yes, she was the making of him, turned him from idleness and love of ease into a real man, with high thoughts and aims. I shall never cease to honour and respect her; and she was but a mere girl. So much for Girton, say I”

“ Dr. Grantham,” said the Vicar, turning to him, “ you remember Rivièrè’s picture of Circe? ”

“ I do. What of it? ”

“ Why, I always couple my remembrance of the figure of Circe in that picture with Miss Myles.”

“ My good friend, that is surely not meant for a compliment? ”

“ Yes, it is. I think the artist was most skilful in representing Circe as a simple girl clad in a white robe—power veiled under simplicity.”

“ Merciful heavens! Ashcroft, do you re-

verence a power which can convert men into swine?"

"Ah! that is what I want to prove. The men were already swine—swinish in heart and desires. Circe only showed them as they were; called out the concealed swinishness for their discomfiture."

"Heaven preserve us all from such Circes, however simply clad, say I," said Dr. Grantham, energetically.

"I think I should like a stroll in the garden before joining the ladies, if you will kindly excuse me," said the young man, rising.

"Certainly, certainly; we shall not ourselves be long away from the ladies, shall we, doctor?" said the Vicar, gaily. "Venerande puer," added Mr. Ashcroft, looking after Herbert.

Dr. Grantham, to whom this quotation was addressed almost as a question, which asked for an affirmative response, hardly heard it. He had just perceived that the harebells which Miss Myles had worn had either been laid aside by her, and were left purposely on the table, or that they had fallen down accidentally as she rose.

"The bonny things are drooping, sadly

drooping ; but I will take them to her," he said to himself, and he carefully placed them in his coat.

Had the Vicar taken as much pleasure in the "bonny flowers" as Dr. Grantham he would have noticed that the doctor's fingers trembled violently as he was placing them in his button-hole, but Mr. Ashcroft's eyes were following Herbert Langridge crossing the lawn.

"Quo pulchrior alter
Non fuit *Æneadum*,"

said the Vicar.

Dr. Grantham having succeeded in fastening in the bluebells, turned his eyes in obedience to Mr. Ashcroft's gesture, and nodded assent with a smile.

Dr. Grantham, like all great scholars, never quoted the Greek and Latin authors so familiar to him. The habit of verbal quotation seldom, in fact, goes with deep scholarship. Boys fresh from successful examinations sometimes disport themselves in that way, often to the great delectation of their parents and sisters. Happily it has not yet been alleged that the women and girls who have distinguished themselves in

the classics have made themselves obnoxious that way.

Singular it was that only when in the society of the great classic, Dr. Grantham, did Mr. Ashcroft indulge in that harmless recreation, and then his quotations were always confined to the book pre-eminently associated with his schoolboy days.

And Herbert Langridge still wandered among the garden paths and alleys, although the twilight shades had gathered around him, and although she whom he thought fairest among women, and who was wearing at her bosom his gift of flowers, was in the drawing-room. Why did he not hasten to her side, and whisper his grateful appreciation? And she was singing in a full rich voice of rare truth of intonation, and possessing in a high degree the quality called sympathetic. Sometimes he drew near to the open window to listen; he could not see her, he did not wish to see her. Some very lovely faces are often so marred by their expression whilst singing, and he did not wish to run the risk of such a disillusion as might take place if he looked upon the songstress. He need not to have feared, the countenance of

Mary Myles when she gave herself up to song—and what she sung was always either solemn or plaintive—was rapt; her whole aspect that of unconsciousness, as though she was singing in her chamber alone with herself and her God. She might have been a study for one of the heavenly choir of Fra Angelico. Nothing in her could suggest the least resemblance to a *prima donna* expecting applause, who, with rounded elbows held away from her plump form, with many bust quiverings and all the little tricks used for the production of voice, thinks more of her audience than the Master whose sublime strains she is expounding.

The swelling tones of Mary's voice in all its low vibrations were suggestive of power held in, and awoke in those who listened to her breathlessly a far deeper response of feeling than any long drawn out C sharp, however perfect the trill with which it concludes, could have done. And Herbert, after having heard "The Blue Bells," and loving inquiries after "The Highland Laddie," and the still more pathetic "Waly, waly," and "Farewell to Lochaber," came to the conclusion that Miss Myles, if not herself born in Scotland, was of Scotch descent or

parentage. He was delighted with them as he now heard them sung, and quite understood how happy they would make the old Scotchman, Dr. Grantham.

“I will go and ask her to sing some English melody for my benefit now,” he at last said to himself, and emboldened by the thought he put out his hand and drew aside the curtain to enter the drawing-room by the window. Dr. Grantham had just yielded to the solicitations of Mrs. Hazelhurst, and was standing by the side of Miss Myles, who was preluding for him, and as Herbert stepped over the door-sill the good doctor, with a face of inexpressible content, and in a sonorous baritone voice of no mean quality, rolled out the opening lines of “Mary Morison”—

O, Mary, at thy window be,
It is the wish'd, the trysted hour,
Those smiles and glances let me see
That make the miser's treasure poor ;
How blithely wad I bide the stoure,
A weary slave frae sun to sun ;
Could I the rich reward secure,
The lovely Mary Morison.

The young man had paused where he had entered, and his first glance was naturally directed to the two facing him at the piano. Dr. Grantham was necessarily the more con-

spicuous from his upright posture. Did his eyes deceive him? Why, the old Scotchman was actually wearing in his buttonhole some rather faded bluebells!

He looked from him to Miss Myles: the harebells which she had worn at dinner were gone.

CHAPTER VI.

Les jeunes femmes qui ne veulent point paroître coquettes, et les hommes d'un âge avancé qui ne veulent pas être ridicules, ne doivent jamais parler de l'amour comme d'une chose où ils puissent avoir part.

ROCHEFOUCAULD.

A phantasy which nestled in my heart,
And threw upon the magic of a name—
With cruel haste is bidden now depart,
To go into the void from whence it came ;
And dismally the hollow echoes moan,
In that bare chamber where it dwelt alone.

“ My dear Miss Myles,” said Mrs. Hazelhurst, as she entered the schoolroom the next morning a little before noon, “ I come to interrupt you again in your studies, but Dr. Grantham has called ; he is now in the library and wishes to see you there alone.” Mrs. Hazelhurst’s manner was somewhat elated, and her face a little flushed.

“ What can Dr. Grantham wish to say to

me that cannot be deferred?" answered Mary Myles, calmly. "I hope, dear Mrs. Hazelhurst, that he does not think it necessary to thank me personally for singing those little Scotch airs, but he is ever so punctilious and courteous! If you would kindly make my apologies on account of work so much behindhand, which he will readily understand, and for which he will make every allowance, I shall be very much obliged to you."

"Dr. Grantham's desire to see you is not to thank you for the songs you so kindly sang, and which delighted him so much the whole of last evening, neither is it solely to express his gratitude for your gift of blue-bells. It is much more personal than even that," said Mrs. Hazelhurst, smiling.

"Dear Dr. Grantham, what a true old Scotchman he is!" said Miss Myles, turning over the leaves of a lexicon as if searching for a word, but without offering to rise. "Who but himself," she continued, with a smile, "would have picked up and laid store by those little withered blossoms when I had discarded them, and left them upon the table? It would not surprise me were I to hear that he has put them into water."

“Nor me either,” said Mrs. Hazelhurst, archly.

“Then must I really go to him, Mrs. Hazelhurst? I would not slight him for the world,” and she rose to go. “I shall not be absent many minutes, Helen; you can continue that subject.”

“Now, dear Mrs. Hazelhurst, what is this important affair that makes you look at me so mysteriously?” said Miss Myles in her sweet resolute voice as she paused on the landing, when she had closed the study door.

“What does it mean?”

“What does it mean? Why, that you are the happiest and most fortunate of any woman I know.” And kind Mrs. Hazelhurst put a hand upon each shoulder of her governess and kissed her on her forehead. “Clever little thing,” she said, smiling; “it was the bluebells and the Scotch songs that decided him to make up his mind at once.”

“Decided him to make up his mind!”

“Now, do not pretend that you do not understand. Really I did not think that it was in you; but all women are alike, and, in this case, I am glad of it. He might have gone on for two or three years longer if your skilful tactics had not brought him to book.”

The colour that had mounted to Mary's brow now faded away to a deadly pallor.

"If I rightly understand you, Mrs. Hazelhurst, you are speaking of Dr. Grantham in the light of a possible husband to myself. If this be your meaning I am more grieved than I can possibly express, both upon my own account as well as his."

Mrs. Hazelhurst took her hands off her governess's shoulders. "Grieved!" she echoed, as her smiles died away.

"Yes, deeply, deeply grieved; and if—as your words seem to imply—any unthinking action of mine has led to this—more than grieved—bitterly repentant."

"It is my turn now, Miss Myles," rejoined Mrs. Hazelhurst, coldly, "to ask—What does this mean?"

"It means that I cannot be Dr. Grantham's wife."

"You cannot be his wife!" said Mrs. Hazelhurst, recoiling a few paces and regarding her with fixed surprise. "And, for Heaven's sake, why not?" she asked, somewhat indignantly.

"Simply because I must love before I can entertain any idea of marriage," answered Mary, firmly, looking straight into

Mrs. Hazelhurst's face with her clear, true eyes.

"Oh! is that all?" and Mrs. Hazelhurst tossed her head impatiently. "Who would have expected to hear Miss Myles talk in such a strain! But that is a matter that follows, of course; it is every woman's duty to love her husband, and, as Dr. Grantham's wife—I need hardly remind you that it is a great compliment—and so much beloved, too, as he is. There, go; do not keep the dear, good man in suspense. You are not a child not to know—"

"What is good for me," interrupted the governess, smiling, but with a slightly-curled lip. "Well, I will grant, Mrs. Hazelhurst, that for another woman—for one who could love him—that there could be no happier position than that of his wife—I can say that feelingly—I, who so love and respect him as a friend; but I cannot be that wife."

Mrs. Hazelhurst looked at her gravely upon hearing those resolute words.

"It seems hardly credible," she said, more tenderly; "but still it may be so. Dear Miss Myles, are your affections pre-engaged?"

"Always the same question," said Mary,

half-laughing. She paused and looked beyond Mrs. Hazelhurst through the open windows, then resumed, slowly, "I am not in love, and I have never been in love, wherefore you see that I am still unmarried."

"My dear Miss Myles, ladies are not supposed to entertain any thoughts about love until it comes before them under the form of a proposal—at least, that was the old-fashioned idea, and it has been enunciated by several writers, and you are the last person from whom I should have expected to hear such remarks."

"Well, then, I suppose, dear Mrs. Hazelhurst," she retorted, with rather a kindling eye, "that I am no lady—only a woman—a woman of the people—for I have thought a good deal about this question, and I shall recognize what love is when it comes to me, if not under the form of a proposal."

Mrs. Hazelhurst looked at the speaker with unfeigned surprise.

"Why, you talk like a Radical," she said, laughing; "but Dr. Grantham, poor man, is pacing the library whilst you are arguing and proving nothing. Come, no more affectation," and, giving her a playful pat, Mrs. Hazelhurst turned away towards her boudoir.

“It will be all right, I know,” she cried, as she opened the door and went in.

Mary Myles stood for a few moments half irresolute.

“I wish that I could have been spared this,” she murmured; “but perhaps he will not feel it very much—he is a learned man and a scholar, and has many resources—a woman’s love can’t be much to him at his age. And then,” she was about to add, “he well knows his own worth.” But she checked herself, for she loved the doctor much in a quiet, homely fashion, and opening the library door softly she stood before him.

Dr. Grantham was standing in the middle of the room with his face fixed upon its entrance. Neither spoke, but a sudden light illumined the professor’s face as gravely and almost reverently he advanced towards her. Outstretching both hands he took one of hers into each of his and held them, looking at her attentively.

Dr. Grantham had been considering an elaborate exordium. He loved rounded periods and flowery phrases. He was going to tell Mary Myles that he had loved her ever since that day six years ago when she brought before him a long-cherished Homeric ideal of

woman. Yes, when he saw in her Nausikaa in the life. But a great change had come upon the professor in the last few hours. The caution, which had been stronger than love, had faded away. All his schemes of submitting the woman before him to a test were forgotten. A real and great love had revealed itself in the eleventh hour, as it were, in his heart, and had crushed out every selfish calculation of the expediency of offering her his hand. For the first time in his life he felt that to acquire the love of a noble-minded woman was more to him than his valuable library—aye, more to him than the whole universe. Could it be possible that this beautiful, this gifted, this clear-souled woman deigned to love him? This was the question which Dr. Grantham had asked himself again and again through the long and sleepless night. Could it be possible? Unaccountable as this now seemed to him in all the humility of this new birth in his soul, yet it was true. Mary Myles had actually condescended to love him—him. She had shown it so truly and yet so sweetly. What a glorious simplicity the girl had! And the professor worked himself up to such a pitch

of impassioned reverence for the lady of his waking dreams that had he cast himself at her feet as she came into the room it would have been entirely in accordance with the tumult of his feelings and his deep sense of gratitude ; but he restrained himself with an effort, and merely took one of her hands in each of his.

For some moments he seemed unable to find any words, under the pressure of a strong emotion. His hands, which lightly held hers within their grasp, trembled ; and his voice also had a strange tremor in it as he said at last —

“ My dear girl, Mrs. Hazelhurst has told you wherefore I have come.”

Miss Myles did not look up now, and her lips quivered as she answered —

“ It had been better if you had written, Dr. Grantham.”

Dr. Grantham smiled.

“ Mary,” he said, in a low voice, “ I did not write because I would not deprive myself of an exquisite pleasure,” and his hands closed around hers with a firmer clasp. “ I longed to hear you say ‘ Yes ; ’ to hear your own dear lips tell me that you loved me well

enough to be my wife. You will be my wife, Mary, will you not?" and he essayed to draw her closer to him.

"Spare me—spare yourself!" was the only answer.

Dr. Grantham started, and let fall her hands.

"Your fingers are quite cold, child!" he gasped. "You had better be seated; you are ill."

"No, Dr. Grantham, I am not ill; I am only very unhappy."

Mary Myles involuntarily laid her hand upon his arm; she felt a shudder run through it.

"Speak plainly," he said, somewhat sternly; "say you do not love me."

"I cannot be your wife, Dr. Grantham! Why ask more?"

"Why ask more! why ask more! Look up—look up, child; a true, good face, not one that deceives. It is I, then, who have deceived myself! It is I that have been wrong, and it is I that must suffer—I alone. I would not ask you to be my wife if you could not love me, Mary. Dear girl, you did not like to say the cruel words. But it comes to this you see, child, that I must say

them for you, ‘ Foolish old man, Mary Myles does not love you after all ! ’ ”

There was a deep silence of some moments. The breathing of Dr. Grantham was quick and laboured from his suppressed emotions.

“ Dr. Grantham,” said Mary, timidly, her hand still resting on his arm, “ have I anything to reproach myself with ? Have I been unthinking ? Have I done aught that will sever our friendship—the friendship I have valued so much, and clung to ; yes, clung to ever since you came to Sunnyside ? ”

“ I thought so, I thought so ! Yours is a virginal heart, Mary, or you could never think that love could glide into friendship. The reverse may happen, but never, never can friendship take the place of love ! No, child, I can never look upon your face again. You do not know what love is,” he said, bitterly ; “ and yet—”

And yet, Dr. Grantham had not felt the possibility of love until his fiftieth year, and then it was six years after before he was able to recognize that love meant self-renunciation.

A crimson flush mounted to the very roots of her hair at those words ; but she was

silent, although she quailed under their import. Dr. Grantham looked at her long and steadfastly.

“There is a well of love in your heart,” he said, in dry and measured tones; “but it is not for me. Happy the man who shall sound its depths!” He gently removed her hand from his arm. “Your touch burns like fire. I am a foolish old man, a foolish old man. Don’t look so pitiful child, or you’ll kill me! Oh, God!”

A deadly pallor overspread the doctor’s face. He staggered a few steps backward and sank into a chair.

Mary sprang to his side.

“Dear, dear Dr. Grantham!” she cried; but he had fainted.

CHAPTER VII.

To sorrow,
I bade good morrow,
And thought to leave her far away behind ;
But cheerily—cheerily,
She loves me dearly ;
She is so constant to me and so kind ;
I would deceive her,
And so leave her,
But, ah ! she is so constant and so kind.

KEATS.

LUNCHEON was served, but there were present only Mrs. Hazelhurst and Helen.

“ So you have not seen Miss Myles either, Helen. Where can she be ? ”

Mrs. Hazelhurst had retired to her boudoir after waving her hand playfully to Miss Myles as she bade her to hasten to Dr. Grantham, who was so impatiently awaiting her in the library. Mrs. Hazelhurst, however, was too excited to sit down quietly to

work or read ; she was curious to know what would be the result of the meeting after what had just transpired between her governess and herself. For the first time since Mary Myles had come to Sunnyside Mrs. Hazelhurst was annoyed with her. Unknowingly, however, she had been annoyed with her for several days. There was a change in her, a change in her costume, in her demeanour, even the arrangement of her hair was changed. She looked so much younger : she looked actually girlish ; in fact, she seemed suddenly to have thrown off five or six years in her appearance ; she really did not look so old as when she had first entered her service four years ago. Yes, entered her service. Mrs. Hazelhurst loved and respected Miss Myles very much. One great point in her estimation of her governess was that, notwithstanding the familiarity of her pupil, the spoilt only child, who persisted out of school hours to call her teacher "Polly," yet this fond disrespect had never led to any reciprocity in a similar style from the object of it. She had always been in Mrs. Hazelhurst's eyes that which she wished her to be, "quite the governess," and although out of the innate generosity of her womanly

heart she would rejoice to see her Mrs. Grantham—and when Mrs. Grantham she would treat her with all the reverential respect due to Dr. Grantham's wife—yet, whilst she was Miss Myles and Helen's governess, she did not desire to see any of the conventionalities relaxed. Miss Myles, moreover, had not welcomed with gratitude the promotion in view, which Mrs. Hazelhurst thought that she had been instrumental in bringing about. It is universally felt to be an injury, and to be resented as such, if, when you have carefully prepared for another some good thing, which you consider a most unexceptionable benefit for the person concerned, the proffered blessing, instead of awakening a lively gratitude, be coldly rejected. The ignorance and folly of such an individual who will not or cannot grasp a fact so patent to the insight of yourself is worthy of reprobation and contempt. How very strangely, too, had Miss Myles talked this morning! She had spoken of love in language that hardly seemed proper when coming from a governess to whom was entrusted the education of well-born maidens.

It *was* strange for her to have such thoughts, and to express herself about love

in so commonplace a fashion, and then to speak of herself as “a woman of the people.” That phrase brought to Mrs. Hazelhurst’s mind all kinds of abominations—Radicalism, Socialism, Communism, and the French Revolution ! She had, she thought, seen that expression, “*femme du peuple*” in “*l’Histoire des Girondistes*,” and she had once come across a dreadful book of Emile Souvestre’s where there was a “*fille du peuple*.” “She couldn’t have learned that at Girton, I should think,” said Mrs. Hazelhurst to herself. “I wonder who her father was ?” It will thus be seen that Mrs. Hazelhurst was criticising one whom till now she had considered to be above all criticism. “I shall be glad to see her well married. I hope they will make up matters; they are a long time about it,” and Mrs. Hazelhurst walked about her boudoir impatiently, occasionally opening the door and listening. “Nearly three quarters of an hour ! I never heard of such a thing. Why, it will soon be luncheon time,” and the usually genial, good-tempered Mrs. Hazelhurst felt irritated, and this irritation was still present when luncheon was announced and Herbert—but especially Miss Myles—were absent.

In her boudoir Mrs. Hazelhurst had made a mental programme of the course she should take in the next three years. Miss Myles married, she should go abroad with Helen and give her the advantages of studying French, Italian, and German in their respective countries. On their return, Helen, being then eighteen, the cousins might reasonably be engaged. As she thought of Helen, the mother's pride in her beauty rose. "A lucky young fellow if he does but know it, and with her fortune, too," and then she wished that Herbert would show more pleasure in the society of his cousin. This was only the third day, certainly, of his visit, but she had not seen him seek Helen's side voluntarily once, nor had he as yet made any proposition for another ride. He did not care for lawn tennis—had never played it, and did not want to learn—so what was to be done to bring them into the close intimacy of cousinship? And her nephew did not look happy, he had not come in to breakfast until all had retired except herself, and then he looked as if he had been up all night, and he had confessed to having been out ever since five a.m., and now he was out somewhere again. Nothing had gone on as

she had wished since he came down only a few days ago.

Mrs. Hazelhurst glanced at Helen and saw that her beautiful face, usually so sunny, was clouded.

“ Helen, it is dull work for your cousin, as the Ashcroft boys are away, for it seems to me that he does not care much for the society of us women only. We must see what we can do to enliven him, and I see no other way than for you to leave off every pretext of studies whilst he is here. Nothing will do him more good than a daily scamper with you to all his old haunts. He cannot be allowed to go about moping by himself. Parker,” she said to the servant who was just entering the room, “ will you tell Bowles to see if Miss Myles is in her room ? ”

“ If you please, madam, Miss Myles left a message with Bowles that she had gone to Braemar with Dr. Grantham, and probably should not be in at luncheon.”

Mrs. Hazelhurst drew back her head, but merely said —

“ We will not wait, Helen.”

When Mrs. Hazelhurst did not lead the conversation Helen knew that silence was

expected of her, and although a merry twinkle in her eyes displaced their former aggrieved expression, she made no remark upon the last communication as regarded her governess.

They were about to rise when Herbert hastily entered, looking very pale and weary and as if he had not only been up all the previous night, but every night for a week at the very least.

“Pray forgive, dearest aunt and cousin mine,” he cried, with an appearance of forced gaiety as he dropped into his seat; “I have been exploring all the old haunts and I lost my way.”

“You look very ill, Herbert; what can be the matter?” cried Mrs. Hazelhurst with anxiety.

“Oh, ‘tis nothing—just a little fatigue. Helen, are you ready for a ride this afternoon?”

“You are already too tired to think of it, Herbert,” said her mother, without allowing Helen to answer.

“Answer, Helen, for yourself,” cried the young man, as he seized the claret jug, and pouring out a full tumbler drank it off.

“ Shall we have another scamper this afternoon ? ”

Mrs. Hazelhurst regarded him with wonder, mingled with affectionate solicitude.

“ Why don’t you answer, Helen ? Leave all the musty old books, I say, and come with me, there’s a good little cousin.”

“ My mother has just given me a holiday for the whole of your visit, Herbert,” said Helen, colouring, “ but to-morrow will be better for a ride, as you are already so tired.”

“ To-morrow ! to-morrow ! I hate to-morrows ; you must come to-day, Helen.”

Was this Herbert ? Mrs. Hazelhurst beheld him with perplexity. Was everybody losing their identity ? He was as much unlike his own true self as the Miss Myles of that morning to the quiet, self-repressed governess of the last four years.

“ Eat your luncheon, dear boy, for as yet you have taken nothing. In an hour or two I will decide whether it be advisable for Helen to ride with you this afternoon. By-the-bye,” she said, as if desirous to bring about a conversation upon that topic which was underlying everything else, “ did you meet Miss Myles and Dr. Grantham ? ”

Herbert laid down the knife and fork which he had just taken up.

“Where could I meet Miss Myles and Dr. Grantham?” he asked in hollow tones.

“Where? Why, they were walking out together this morning, so I rather suspect that Miss Myles has gone with him to look over his house.”

Mrs. Hazelhurst had tried to speak carelessly, but it was not a success.

“I think,” she resumed, after a pause, as her observation elicited no remark, “that it will not be long now before Miss Myles becomes Mrs. Grantham.”

“Why did you not tell me that they were engaged, aunt?” asked Herbert, hurriedly.

Helen’s face became crimson.

“But are they really engaged, mother?”

“There can be no doubt about that, I should think,” answered Mrs. Hazelhurst with some asperity, passing over her nephew’s excited question; “the fact alone of Miss Myles walking home with him after his proposal this morning is evidence enough. It is extremely strange that they did not come to me and announce the glad tidings in person, but I suppose that they are both a little odd, like most learned people, or

possibly Miss Myles herself might feel a little shy after her strong protestations just an hour before that such an engagement was impossible."

Mrs. Hazelhurst looked at her nephew with a smile, but both he and Helen seemed impervious, and were obstinately regarding the tablecloth.

"I am exceedingly rejoiced at it myself," she resumed, "for it is a splendid marriage for her, and her acceptance of him acquits her of all coquetry."

"Coquetry, mother!" cried Helen, with some indignation.

"Yes, coquetry. To sing his favourite Scotch songs to a Scotchman whom she knew admired her, merely to have the gratification of refusing him, would have appeared to me heartless coquetry. I am glad, however, that all has ended as in all honour it was bound to end."

"I think Dr. Grantham is a great deal too old for her," said Helen, knitting her handsome brows.

"Helen, my dear, you are too young to understand such questions, and I ought not to have alluded to the subject before you, but as I have done so I can only say that I

have looked forward to this with great pleasure, as they are both very dear to me."

Notwithstanding the expression of this kindly sentiment Mrs. Hazelhurst felt somewhat embittered against Miss Myles on account of the ingratitude, as she deemed it, to herself, which feeling had obliged her to forget the customary decorum by thus pre-announcing an engagement of which she was in reality quite ignorant.

"My dear boy, surely you have not finished?"

"Yes, aunt, thank you. I shall be in better appetite at dinner. I fancy I have over-walked myself, but I have letters to write, so I will go to my room, with your permission, for an hour or so, and then may I sue for a stroll along some quiet lanes you may know of, with yourself and Helen?"

"You will not find me a good companion for a walk, Herbert," said Mrs. Hazelhurst, although evidently pleased.

"I am only thinking of a little dawdle, dear aunt, where there are some banks to rest upon. You must not refuse me."

"Yes, indeed, I shall, Herbert, so far. I intend to order the carriage, which will be a mutual compromise. We will drive to the

old Abbey, and, although you are usually, as I hear, an inveterate walker, yet I think you will confess to the desirability to-day of trusting to other legs than your own."

Her nephew smiled assent.

"At what time will you start, aunt?"

"Half-past four," and as they rose Mrs. Hazelhurst bent forward and kissed him on his forehead.

Just as Herbert was about to spring into the carriage, in which his aunt and cousin had already been sitting for some minutes awaiting him, Miss Myles appeared at a curve in the drive, walking very slowly. At the sight of the carriage she pulled her shadowy hat still further over her brow, and quickened her pace with the evident intention of speaking.

Herbert, who had paused, stood aside from the carriage door as she approached.

"Do you go with us?" he said, huskily.

"I am not in costume for driving," she answered.

"Nor for taking a walk with Dr. Grant-ham," thought Mrs. Hazelhurst, glancing at the cotton gown and garden hat.

"I will not detain you now, dear Mrs. Hazelhurst. I have something I wish to tell

you, but it will be better to wait until after dinner."

Mrs. Hazelhurst smiled upon her and nodded kindly.

"I hope you will enjoy your drive, Helen."

Then half-turning away her head she looked from under her hat straight and without blenching into Herbert's troubled face.

"Good-bye for the present," she said, in a very low voice, and as the eyes of the boy and the woman met each said of the other —

"And you too have been weeping."

When any scene or passing trial has stirred the deepest and most pathetic emotions of our being, and is, as it were, photographed in our very souls, so long as those emotions remain in their strength, through whatever phase of life we pass, we see and feel but that one scene in its entirety and prominence. All other objects are but backgrounds, mezzotints, throwing up rather than hiding the well-graven outlines and broad colours of the chief group.

The kindest of friends, anxious to dispel a wearing grief or temporary sadness, may

carry us away to the haunts of gaiety, but whilst decorum and a grateful sense of kindness commands the temporary putting aside of every outward show of that grief which presses so heavily on the heart, and even although a smile may flicker on the countenance, yet the sense of the inner sorrow is all the more prominent from this unnatural and forcible suppression. We see not that which is presented to our external vision. It is not Perdita giving away her flowers or bounding in the unrestrained rustic dance; it is the daughter torn from us in her blossoming girlhood whom we behold in the graceful delineation of one of the most charming of Shakespeare's creations, and so for all the rest.

Nature is the best physician for every ill of mind or body, but for the healing of the former we must seek her—alone.

The carriage rolled on through lovely lanes. In the hazel coppices the nut-hatch was already counting the nuts; the fruit of the bird-cherry was just putting on a red garb before donning later on its autumn garment of sober black; the spindle tree was also beginning to hang out its pretty capsules on the slenderest of foot-stalks, which, now only

a pale green, would, when September came, give almost a fairy lustre to the hedge-rows with their rose-pink hues.

Through lanes, over sloping glades, out on to the broad heath-lands rolled the carriage, the cheerful voices of two loving women mingling with the genial song of Nature. Now it would be Mrs. Hazelhurst, who would draw Herbert's attention to the rich foliage of an aged oak, whose heavy branches, gnarled with the weight of years, flung their long arms across the road. Now it was Helen, who would point out the beauties of some graceful ash—the Venus of the woods.

Herbert courteously regarded all that was pointed out to him with apparent appreciation, and his words expressed all the admiration that was due, but ever there intervened through every shadowy outline one scene—and one scene alone—Mary Myles kneeling by the side of Dr. Grantham, his head reclining on her shoulder and her arm encircling his neck.

CHAPTER VIII.

And therefore it seems (though rarely) that love can find entrance, not only into an open heart, but also into a heart well fortified, if watch be not well kept.

BACON.

ONLY twenty-four hours ago ! It seemed to two who met at dinner that night as if it might have been twenty-four years ! Yesterday, at the same table, happiness (delusive guest though she ever proves to be) had sunned herself in the hearts of the middle-aged possessor of erudition and that young man, there sitting together, and all in reference to a woman who, with singular unconsciousness of the import attached by both to her every word and gesture, had been merely assiduous to give some passing pleasure to each—to be kind and encouraging to the rather bashful young man and grateful and attentive to the older man. Now, she re-

gretfully ascribed all the palpable results so far as regarded young Herbert Langridge as due to her folly in playing the wood-nymph; for that appellation of his came even spontaneously to herself. To what had her whim for indulging in unconventionalities brought her, with her bared feet and loosened hair? Yet were not the unshod feet and ungirt waist but after all a reminiscence of her unclouded childhood? What else but a fond memory had led her to this sportive vagary? Was it not her mother who had said, "My little darling has a form perfect as a child of the Graces, and no deforming fashions shall mar its beauty?" and had rejoiced to see the tiny maiden disport on the close-shaven lawn of Hazeldean Lodge when the summer suns had dried the dews, as she danced along by her mother's side with feet all unwitting of sock or shoe.

"And he, too, loves me, poor boy," she had said, with more bitterness than satisfaction, as she slowly descended to dinner. "And why? Because he is under the dominating sway of those first impressions. Would he have been borne away by this foolish love if he had seen me for the first time as Miss Myles, the governess?"

And, therefore, the dinner was dull, although Mrs. Hazelhurst tried her very best to enliven it. She was curious to hear from Miss Myles's own lips all the account of how it had happened that she had consented to become Dr. Grantham's wife notwithstanding her protestations to the contrary. Inwardly she thought her very tiresome in thus deferring the announcement until after dinner, when she could so easily in a small whisper have conveyed her the intelligence which she so well knew would please her. And how dismal she looked ! not a bit like the radiant girl of yesterday, winning all hearts. In that retrospection Mrs. Hazelhurst was quite ready to confess to herself that it had not been without some considerable alloy that in that meeting of two or three old friends the one point of attraction seemed to be her governess, instead of her being an agreeable adjunct merely. To-day, however, Miss Myles was again herself, according to Mrs. Hazelhurst's estimation of the quiet, dignified demeanour which, accompanied as it had always been with an appearance of sweet and grave submission, had early won her respect and affection. This reticent gravity was, nevertheless, to-day

rather inopportune, as it checked Mrs. Hazelhurst from alluding playfully, as she was longing to do, to the engagement to Dr. Grantham, which had evidently been accomplished in the face of all the protestations of that morning.

Herbert, too, spoke little; but in the courtesies of the table how studious he showed himself to show the governess every attention. So markedly respectful was his manner when the smallest opportunity was afforded him for anticipating the servant in waiting, that if Mrs. Hazelhurst had not been wholly absorbed by thoughts of Dr. Grantham she could not but have remarked it. Once, as he hastened to procure some slight requirement, Mary almost involuntarily flashed upon him a kindling glance instead of spoken thanks, whilst she said to herself, "A good young man, with a noble nature."

As her eyes were again lowered to the level of some flowers that seemed to-day to chain their attention, she pursued the thought that had been just awakened. "Most young men with similar feelings, however transient their character, would have shown some measure of angry scorn;" and as she recalled the shadow darkening

the window that morning whilst Dr. Grantham lay in a faint supported by her arm, and which had caused her to raise her head, when her eyes met the fixed, set gaze of Herbert Langridge, how thankful at heart was she that her lids had not quivered before that look, and that she had not withdrawn from her position by the sick man's side.

“He is worthy of a woman's love,” was her silent verdict, whilst Mrs. Hazelhurst was burning to hear the confession of her engagement with Dr. Grantham.

After the servants had retired it was no longer possible to refrain from some allusion to Braemar.

“How you must revel in Dr. Grantham's library, dear Miss Myles! I suppose its magnitude impressed you to-day more than ever.”

“I have not been in Dr. Grantham's library to-day,” answered the governess, quietly, without withdrawing her eyes from the tablecloth. “A large library is a grand sight, but it awes me beyond sense of enjoyment. Perhaps, after all, the *Times* was in the main, right, although when I read the remark I resented it as one of the impertinences so often bestowed upon us poor women.”

“ May I ask what was the impertinence, Miss Myles ? ” said Herbert, smiling.

“ Why, that ‘ Big libraries are not made for women, nor women for big libraries.’ I acknowledge now that I look with great admiration on a large library ; but if it came to reading, why I can read better, and enjoy what I read more, with half-a-dozen books in a small, cosy room. I confess with humiliation how, being left alone once in one of the finest private libraries our country possesses—as a great treat with ‘ three hours’ undisturbed possession,’ as I was told—I actually did not read one line, but wandered about the whole time allotted to me in a vague spirit of unrest, only looking at the backs of the volumes.”

“ Perhaps that was before you were in training,” observed Herbert, smiling ; “ for it does require training to know how to make use of a library.”

“ I think you are right ; it was so.”

Mrs. Hazelhurst cared nothing about the question of big libraries and women’s appreciation of them, and she had failed so far ; but she was not yet discomfited.

“ Before we retire, Herbert, I propose that we drink Dr. Grantham’s health, and

may his library never be less," she said, laughing.

Herbert reached out his hand to the nearest decanter.

"Stay, Mr. Langridge. Dear Mrs. Hazelhurst, I did not wish to distress you prematurely. I wished to tell you when we were alone that which will pain you much to hear, but Dr. Grantham is at this moment very ill."

"Very ill!"

"I did not leave him until he was reported to be out of immediate danger—but—"

"Danger!" echoed Mrs. Hazelhurst, turning pale; "but he was well enough this morning. What is it? What can be the matter?"

"We thought he was well this morning, but we were in as complete ignorance of the real state of his health as he was himself, for he is suffering from hypertrophy of the heart of long standing."

On the eighth morning following upon this day Herbert Langridge met Miss Myles at the hall door, where she was awaiting him, and placed a letter in her hands.

"I was to give you this, Miss Myles. It was written last evening, and was laid out ready for me this morning. Dr. Grantham

was up and dressed, and was in his library, but was too busy to see me."

"This is indeed good news."

As Miss Myles thus spoke she held out to him the hand that was free, but her eyes had more eloquent thanks in their expression, had he but seen it, but his own were averted, and he made no attempt to retain the hand which she laid in his.

He had gone very early every morning to inquire after the doctor's health, and as upon the first day he had expressly sought out Miss Myles in order to give the bulletin to her before anyone else, it was afterwards assumed that these before breakfast inquiries were almost entirely on her behalf, as the one who of all others was more directly interested in the state of Dr. Grantham's health.

"Poor dear girl," Mrs. Hazelhurst often repeated, "she will do her duty by him if he should not be the same man again; of that I am quite sure."

After that anxious, sleepless first night, when Mary with pale, wan face, obeying the summons of the breakfast bell, had met Herbert Langridge, who was just entering the hall, with what inward surprise did she see

him hurry to her, and hear him in a voice of deep feeling declare that he had been over to Braemar, and was rejoiced to be able to tell her that Dr. Grantham had passed an excellent night, and was much refreshed. Mary, whilst thanking him warmly, had felt her throat swell, and she knew that tears were in her eyes; and Herbert noticed how strong was her suppressed emotion, and saw the tears. He accepted the thanks as for himself, but the half choked voice and the rising tears he knew were for Dr. Grantham. But he was mistaken, the tears were for him.

And the next morning, and the next, and the next, throughout the whole week, Mary had sat by the open casement of her chamber window, watching for his coming, and her fingers had plucked nervously at the clustering clematis in bloom around it, until she saw him unhasp the gate at the far end of the walk. She would then run down to meet him, to hear from his own lips the glad reports of the doctor's daily returning health and strength; and yesterday Dr. Grantham had sent for the messenger to his bedside, and had had some minutes' conversation with him. "Tell that dear girl," he had said, at parting, "that I feel as well as if nothing

had ever been the matter with me ; it is only the doctors who persist in holding me fast with their manacles and fetters.” Herbert suppressed the “dear girl,” but tried to say gaily, “I have seen him, Miss Myles, and he expressly enjoined me to impress upon you that you have no longer any need to be anxious upon his account,” but he did not look upon her as he said those words, and hardly stayed for her thanks.

“Poor fellow !” sighed Miss Myles, a little disappointed ; “how good he is !”

But he was so late in returning this morning that she had not waited for the creak of the gate, but had stolen down softly, and was standing looking wistfully through the stained glass windows.

“Poor dear girl,” said Mrs. Hazelhurst, who had seen her from the breakfast-room, “how anxious she is to have the first news ; but that is natural ; much as we all love him it is more to her than to anyone else.”

“There is no need to ask you what good news Herbert has brought you, dear Miss Myles,” said Mrs. Hazelhurst, cheerfully, as they were seating themselves at the breakfast table ; “and a letter, too. Now, do not lay it on one side, my dear ; we shall be so busy

with our coffee cups that you will be able to read it without any observation. All the gladsome tidings in its contents which it is befitting us to know, you can give us in an epitome afterwards."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hazelhurst, but I have glanced over it sufficiently to be able to inform you of that which is of the most concern to us all, namely, Dr. Grantham's condition, and you will be delighted to hear that he is considered to be quite fit to travel; in fact, he is at this very moment about to leave home."

"To travel!" cried Mrs. Hazelhurst and Helen simultaneously; "but of course not for long."

"Yes, for long. His friends in England will not see him again for a very long time; it may possibly be years. Italy and Greece will both keep him for many months, and he will winter in Athens, which he is told is a favourable spot for those who suffer from any affections of the heart."

Mrs. Hazelhurst looked at the speaker with unmitigated surprise. What could it mean? How could she look so calm—nay, almost cheerful?

"It seems to me to be very strange alto-

gether to go away without any leave-taking," and Mrs. Hazelhurst fixed inquiring and perplexed looks upon her governess, who sat there so unmoved.

"He takes leave in this letter. It is charged with many kind messages, which I will not spoil by repeating at random. The medical advisers commanded him to go away without taking any farewells. His future health will depend upon avoiding all excitement."

"Who accompanies him, may I ask?"

"Only his old servant, Fletcher."

"Then who will take care of his library?"

"It is to be locked up."

Mrs. Hazelhurst looked almost indignant, and as she handed Herbert a cup of coffee she gave him a little confidential toss of the head, meaning to convey to him the mistakes in life that are continually made by learned people where matters of the heart are involved. It was very perplexing, but the commiseration which was so ready to flow from her lips was arrested by the expression of content so distinctly visible in every lineament of her governess's countenance.

"It has been a terrible week for us all!" she at last ejaculated.

Miss Myles made no comment. She did not ordinarily exhibit any emotion, whether of joy or grief, in public. It had, nevertheless, been a terrible week for her. She had wept and prayed, prayed and wept far into those first nights when the prospect of the sick man's recovery was a thing of doubt, and her thankfulness had been commensurate with her sorrow when she had realized that although, through his love for herself, the good doctor's life had been somewhat imperilled, yet the first cause of the late danger had not been due to her, and that with care many years of usefulness might still be allotted to him.

For several days, therefore, the weight of her anxiety had been lightened, and when in her wakeful hours her thoughts sometimes reverted to the young man who, loving her, had striven to serve her by bringing to her every morning the earliest news of the state of the sick man whom in all probability he had been led to regard as her future husband, who can wonder that she no longer apostrophized him as "poor boy?"

But for Mrs. Hazelhurst, anxiety was complicated with many other feelings that were bewildering her mental horizon, which always

required to be well defined for her to apprehend clearly. On account of these diverging calls upon her sympathies she did not seem to have realized as much as might have been expected the critical state of her old friend. She had, however, realized that it had made her house anything but a cheerful place for her nephew's holiday, and had every day devised plans whereby he and Helen could ride out together and alone in order that the young people, at least, might get some healthful recreation.

“The boy did not look well ; he had not apparently benefited by the visit in the slightest degree. He was abstracted—almost melancholy. If she would allow him he would be always strolling out by himself. What would her sister say if he returned to her looking so ill ; and yesterday he had positively hinted at leaving in a few days.” Poor Mrs. Hazelhurst was grieved and disappointed. “Of course,” she said to herself, “I don't want him to be thinking about matrimony, and begin to make love to Helen now whilst they are both, so to speak, children ; but still, he hardly seems to notice how beautiful she is growing ! One would think that even a boy of twenty would have

some remarks to make to her mother upon her or show some more than ordinary pleasure when riding by the side of such a Hebe."

But these thoughts, of late so frequent, were banished now in the consideration of Miss Myles's approaching trial.

"Poor, dear girl; another disappointment for her!"

As they were dispersing after a very silent meal, Mrs. Hazelhurst and Helen went simultaneously up to Miss Myles, and the former kissed her on her forehead, whilst the latter put her arms around her neck. Herbert, not caring to be present at this open manifestation of sympathy, hastily left the room.

"We are so sorry for you; you cannot think how much we feel for you," said Mrs. Hazelhurst, softly. "You see dear Helen appreciates the delicate position in which you are placed as much as myself."

A crimson flush overspread Miss Myles's face as she gently released herself from Helen's twining arms, but retained her by taking her hands in each of hers.

"Should it not be an unmixed gladness for us all that Dr. Grantham is able to travel?"

she asked, gravely looking from Helen to Mrs. Hazelhurst. There was no immediate answer. "I have a greater reason to be glad than any one else, but if there be cause for sadness among Dr. Grantham's friends, because they lose his society from amongst them for a long period, it is not one that attaches to me specially above all others."

Mrs. Hazelhurst regarded her in silence.

"If it be possible that you have deceived yourself in this matter, Mrs. Hazelhurst, I trust, at least, that it has rested with yourself. I hope that you have not associated my name with Dr. Grantham's when you have been speaking with your friends."

"To be frank with you, Miss Myles," returned Mrs. Hazelhurst, coldly, "I have not considered it necessary to conceal anything (of what to me, at least, was most manifest) from our mutual friend, Mrs Ashcroft."

"And you too, Helen?"

"I have not talked about what I am not of an age to understand," said Helen, rather archly.

"Then it is only Mrs. Ashcroft who has been misled?"

"Well, of course Herbert looked upon the affair with my own eyes. At least, I suppose

so ; but it did not interest him, apparently, to consider it at all. Anyhow, I think that it is we who have been misled," rejoined Mrs. Hazelhurst, with some irritation.

" Then, for dear Dr. Grantham's sake only, will you kindly undeceive them ? I ask it for dear Dr. Grantham's sake, whom we all equally love and respect."

Mrs. Hazelhurst was inwardly very much annoyed, and in the manner in which Miss Myles couched her appeal there was something which brought the colour into Mrs. Hazelhurst's face. Gentle as the tones were, there was no doubt that the speaker implied that a wrong had been done to an old friend which must be redressed. It said as plainly as possible —

" You have been too thoughtlessly hasty in divulging the secrets of a man's heart. No man cares to have an unrequited love blazoned abroad as a theme for women's idle gossip."

She had always regarded with a zealous reticence, as worthy of the most sacred confidence, the smallest indications of confessions of love, even when they were hardly entitled to be considered so reverently.

" As you put it in this way, Miss Myles,

certainly for dear Dr. Grantham's sake I shall make a point of announcing as soon as possible how greatly I have erred in supposing that an engagement between yourself and my old friend was possible. Helen, make yourself ready; we will drive over to the Vicarage on our way to the schools," and with more hauteur than she had ever before exhibited, Mrs. Hazelhurst left the room, followed by the governess.

"Herbert," said Helen, as she met her cousin in the hall, "why do you not go this morning and help Miss Myles to garden?"

"Help her to garden?"

"Yes, in her own garden, where no gardener is allowed to enter, only the helper—red-haired Joe—and he only when she is there, that she may keep her eyes upon him. It is a pretty, wild place. But surely you have seen it."

"No, indeed, I have neither seen it nor heard of it until now."

"I was telling Herbert about Miss Myles's garden, mother. He has not seen it yet."

Mrs. Hazelhurst, returning equipped for driving, laughed—

"A whim of hers, for, oddly enough, she does not care for highly-cultivated flowers;

so, when she first came here about four years since, she besought me to let her have a piece of ground in some out-of-the-way corner all to herself to remind her of her childhood, when her mother and she lived together on a small pension in true Arcadian fashion. It so happened that I had long been annoyed at a sly rubbish-place where the gardeners deposited everything that they wished to be out of sight. There were accumulations of years, from broken flower-pots, spades without handles, and handles without spades, down to a generation of superannuated wheelbarrows in all positions—a very Golgotha of a place. I was indescribably glad to let her have it, for I durst not complain to Stevenson about it, or it is probable that he would have given me a month's notice forthwith, and I do not know how I could replace him. Gardeners are the chief of our tyrants. Every servant that is worth keeping is more or less of a tyrant, but a good gardener is a veritable despot. With what scorn would Stevenson regard a mistress who could go and 'interfere'—yes, 'interfere' is the word—in such a degrading subject as a rubbish-corner! Somehow Miss Myles got over him, and he

allowed her to have his helper to do what he could under her directions ; but I really believe, Herbert, that Stevenson was all the while amusing himself with the thought of the utter discomfiture of the undertaker of it. He is rather unwilling to see its merits, and it really is a pretty bit of cottage gardening—a little bit of wild nature, if it's nothing else. There you will see all the homely, old-fashioned plants that are just beginning to assert themselves again in some gardens, but Stevenson despises them still. I generally take my friends to see it, and wonder that I did not speak of it before. But go and find it out this morning. I saw Miss Myles go in that direction a few minutes ago, and as Helen and myself are going to the schools to give away some prizes, it will help to pass away your time until we return. You will find it out by the tall ash tree, but any of the gardeners will be glad to show you the way.”

CHAPTER IX.

In July come gilliflowers of all varieties—musk-roses, the lime tree in blossom.

BACON.

Open afresh your round of starry folds,
Ye ardent marigolds.
Dry up the moisture from your golden lids,
For great Apollo bids
That in these days your praises should be sung
On many harps which he has lately strung.
And when again your dewiness he kisses,
Tell him I have you in my world of blisses.

KEATS.

“ THERE, go and help Miss Myles to weed her garden” had been Helen’s laughing admonition, as her mother and herself drove away, and it had been received with a half smile of acquiescence. Herbert looked after the carriage vacantly, and hardly saw the wavings of Helen’s hand as she merrily

pointed out to him the direction in which the garden lay.

“Help Miss Myles to weed her garden.”

It had an attractive sound. He had not spoken with the governess for two consecutive minutes alone since that afternoon when he had met her accidentally at the chestnuts, and had given her some harebells which he had gathered — those harebells which she had worn at her bosom, those bluebells which she had given to Dr. Grantham!

Dr. Grantham was now gone—gone away for many months, perhaps for a year, maybe for ever, an invalid, with a most uncertain term of life, which any hour might terminate; and, of course, she was free again. The whole seemed like a dream, and yet how drearily long this last fortnight at his aunt's had crawled along! How unhappy he had been! and yet what glimpses of joy had sometimes tinged the clouds with silver rims.

He stood and looked at the little winding path indicated, but he did not follow it. Miss Myles, he had been told, rejoiced in the absolute retreat her garden afforded. How could he intrude upon it? What

excuse had he for so doing ? What did he know about gardening, except from Bacon's "Essay," which had been given to him at some examination to render into Latin ? How could he assist her ? When he hardly knew weeds from flowers, could he be bold enough to proffer his help in weeding ? Of all the many bores with which this otherwise happy world is so full, there is no bore so destructive to one's peace of mind as the volunteer who offers his help in matters of which he is profoundly ignorant. Every experience knows the result of weakly yielding to the "Shall I help you ?" of incompetence.

So he stood and pondered, leaning over the gate, and with thoughts akin to the above was mingled the remembrance of a few scenes that had almost burnt themselves into his brain, coming ever as vividly, and with the living movement of copper-plate engravings before him, whether sleeping or waking, whether driving with his aunt or riding with his cousin. Now it was the hamadryad of the chestnuts, and now it was the lovely woman kneeling by the side of Dr. Grantham with upturned face and caressing arm ! But to-day, for the first

time since that terrible morning, as that last scene recurred again, as recur it would, strive as he might to banish it, there flashed upon him suddenly and intuitively the conviction that it was no love scene which he had accidentally beheld, and that the pale face that for one moment lifted its intent gaze from Dr. Grantham and met his own, was one in which deep distress was alone visible. Herbert spurned a stone with his foot.

“Fool that I have been! The good doctor was ill, and she, angel that she is, was ministering to him.” She had never spoken of the form which his sudden illness had taken, nor how nor where it had seized upon him. She had never breathed a word of it to Mrs. Hazelhurst; she had walked home with him, tended him, and nursed him for hours, and had said nothing. “Neither will I ask one question concerning what she has withheld,” said the young man.

A sudden accession of energy came with this last resolve, and Herbert opened the gate and went through, but not in the direction which Helen had pointed out, but into the wider path which led into the gardens of the house. Mrs. Hazelhurst kept eight gardeners

and one helper. The eight gardeners were professional men ; they always spoke of their calling as a profession, and one of them—Mr. Stevenson, the head-gardener—was high up on the professional ladder, and expected to be consulted and to be advised with before the smallest of his rights, as he conceived them, was invaded, or “interfered with” rather. No grapes, not even a peach or a nectarine, must leave its parent bough without his permission. Had Mrs. Hazelhurst herself been rash enough to pluck any of those fruits which cost her so much in their production, Mr. Stevenson would have resented it as a breach of privilege, and would possibly have given notice to leave forthwith. That very particular bunch which she once unthinkingly gathered for a sick friend was the very one destined for exhibition, and which would have carried off the first prize. Visitors were led solemnly through vineeries and peach-houses, and were almost tempted to consider themselves as looking upon the forbidden fruit, so jealously they seemed to be guarded. One thoughtless youth, impelled by that inveterate habit of investigation by touch which infects so many people, whether they be visitors at museums

or vineeries, had several times during a progress under Mr. Stevenson's guidance slightly pinched the pendant clusters.

"Excuse me, sir, but you are rubbing off the bloom and spoiling them for exhibition," said Mr. Stevenson at last, testily, and the humiliated young man made an inward vow, and never again went near a viney nor would touch a grape on Mrs. Hazelhurst's table, bounteous although the supply was ever.

Mr. Stevenson was no niggard, but he rejoiced that in all the liberal gifts of basketsful which issued from Sunnyside to houses less well supplied, that the whole management was left in his hands, as was proper. He reigned supreme, and his right to reign was unquestioned, although not seldom was his rule felt to be a galling one by his kind and liberal mistress. As with the fruits, so with the flowers. Mr. Stevenson had a great name for his gloxinias, gardenias, and other blossoms so dear to exhibitors and seekers for prizes, and many choice exotics, but he himself always dressed the table, and in justice be it said, that there was never any cause for complaint about a lack of flowers wherever or whenever needed. When his name ap-

peared on the prize list Mrs. Hazelhurst was complimented by her friends upon possessing such a gardener, although even each chrysanthemum at the show had cost her a guinea in the rearing. These honours and the compliments of her friends strengthened her fears, lest losing him, his services could with difficulty be replaced, and thus every success only served to strengthen still more his despotic rule.

But in all these grand gardens, where one is not free to “gather the roses while ye may,” there is a sense of restraint, and a stroll in a garden where such autocracy is tolerated is weariness to the flesh. At least so felt Herbert Langridge, as he walked slowly up this path and down that, amid a blaze of colours, artistically enough blended, in the figure beds that nestled on the velvety turf, through arches of roses, over sloping lawns; in short, in a garden where there was everything to charm and delight the senses, but very little to touch the heart. Moreover, to stroll alone in a garden whilst eight gardeners and a help are at work destroys any poetry that attaches to it. The best thing then is to talk to the workers therein and extract some benefit that way; so Herbert, meeting

Stevenson, asked him some trivial question in relation to his art.

“Would you like to see the hot-houses, sir?” asked Stevenson, eagerly, glad of the opportunity thus afforded for displaying their treasures and his skill.

Herbert faintly acquiesced.

“I don’t think you have seen our gloxinias, sir. Mrs. Hazelhurst is very proud of our gloxinias.”

Now it so happened that Herbert hated gloxinias. It seems cold-hearted and ungrateful in anyone to hate a flower so beautiful in its varied colours as the gloxinia, but Herbert had seen them in other houses petted up with cotton wool round their calices, and had conceived at once a dislike to them. They looked, he had thought, like people suffering from toothache, so he indiscreetly answered quickly —

“I do not care for gloxinias, Mr. Stevenson; they seem such stupid flowers.”

Stevenson had his hand on the door. He shut it with a bang, and looked at Herbert with but slightly suppressed contempt and amazement.

“Then it’s of no use showing you the orchids, sir?”

“Yes, I like orchids. They are not stiff and formal. There is poetry in orchids.”

So Herbert was taken through the orchid-house, and he showed due appreciation, and as he did not ask for one for his button-hole, as some “young gents” had done, Stevenson was mollified. He went through other houses also, and said that the contents were all beautiful, and he touched nothing—not a bud nor a leaf—and then he looked at his watch. What was all this sudden interest in the hot-houses and vineeries when it was Mary’s garden whither his heart yearned to go?

Like many other means which are rather roundabout and complex for an end which, looked at broadly, seems a simple matter enough, Herbert was all this time making his way, as he thought, into that other self-same garden. He had decided within himself that he could not go to it alone, and call over or through the hedge, “May I come in?” but under the orthodox guidance of the head-gardener, when he had patiently been the round of the hot-houses, if he were then introduced by him into its sacred precincts, he felt he would have fulfilled all the conditions required by a reticent courtesy. They were

at a door leading out of one house into another.

“Now, Mr. Langridge, I am going to show you our cactus house. There is a night-flowering cereus I should like you to see. I expect that it will blossom in about a fortnight, and it will be well worth anyone’s while to sit up all night and wait for its opening.”

As Mr. Stevenson said this with laudable elation he opened the door. A puff of hot, steamy air blew into Herbert’s face.

“Make haste in, sir, if you please. I can’t have the door kept open.”

“I won’t go in, thank you, Mr. Stevenson; it is too hot. I am very much obliged to you for your attention, but I have not much more time. Will you be so kind as to show me Miss Myles’s garden?”

Mr. Stevenson with great deliberation locked the door, and in silence preceded Herbert back through the house they had previously passed through. Once or twice he stopped to examine some plant. Arrived at the last door he held it open for Herbert to pass out, and then with a great jingling of keys locked that also, after which he raised a whistle which hung round his neck and blew with it shrilly.

“Joe,” he shouted, as the helper appeared, “the gentleman wants to see Miss Myles’s garden,” and Mr. Stevenson raised his hat and turned away.

Joe, the helper, who looked as if he had been lately steeped in liquid manure, had his shirt sleeves tucked up above his elbows. His other chief garment of ribbed cords, the original tint of which was indiscernible, was also rolled up on either leg far above the tops of his thick hobnailed laced boots, which he, in his native Suffolk lingo, designated as “high-lows.” These were well-coated with some peaty-looking substance, and by the above arrangement there was thereby displayed a considerable amount of coarse blue worsted hose. The legs of the aforesaid garment were moreover bound below each knee by a red cotton handkerchief, in order that they might adjust themselves the better for a stooping position, and thus it was not easy to test accurately their fit, but roominess rather than style seemed to have been the object of the designer.

Joe seemed to have a monopoly in red cotton handkerchiefs, for another was bound round his waist instead of a belt to hold up the aforesaid trousers, for he was unbraced.

The collar of his blue striped cotton shirt was open, whilst his sandy shock of hair was also uncovered, and the perspiration which streamed thence down his red and freckled face showed that at least he had really been working hard at some labour which required the putting forth of manual strength.

“I didn’t knaw, sir, as how I had to go along with a gen’lman, sir,” said Joe, as he thrust back his sandy mop with his begrimed hand. “Maister Stevenson needn’t ha’ sent for *me*, cos he knaw’d I war a-turning the muck heap. Hope yow’ll excuse me, sir; one can’t be ower tidy when one’s a-turning muck—that’s sartain, sir.”

“I can quite understand that, Joe,” said Herbert, smiling.

“Fact is, sir, Maister Stevenson is allays a leetle bit sore along o’ Miss Moiles’s garden. Me and she did it all of ourselves, you see, sir, withouten him—leastways, he jest come in once or twoice to see how we wor a-going on. An’ you never seen it, sir?”

“No, Joe, I never knew of it until this morning.”

“Laws, sir, there’s a lot of folks come to the house, surely, but they never go a-till they’ve seen it. It be a roight pretty plaace,

though I helped to maake it. I doan't b'leeve you'd ha' found it by yerself, sir. It's all hidden up so. Miss Moiles woan't let a pair of shears come anigh the hedge. Maister Stevenson say it be all the world jest loike a wilderness, and nowt else. I loike it, you see, 'cause it minds me of my feyther's garden at hoame—lots o' gilliflowers, snapdragons, pinks, and coronations—does one's heart good to see um. She and me maade it together.” Joe paused to take breath. “Miss Moiles woan't ha' noathing that woan't bide the winter, and there's ne'er a path 'cept one that leads up to a seat, and a little bowery-like. When me and Miss Moiles tuk it in hand, sir, it was nowt but rubbish heaps, but we let them all bide, and piled good mowld over 'em, and plenty of it, so it's all up and down—up and down—and covered all ower wi' thoime. Fancy walking on thoime, sir; as if one war on a common, and the flowers coming up just as they loike—that's Miss Moiles's fancy. She an' me did it all.” Joe again paused, but as no remark was elicited from Herbert he went on. “I never see in all my loife sich a lot o' livin' things as tha' be in that gaarden. I s'pose they ha' a loiking kinder for the thoime; and as for bees,

why they come from moiles round. Miss Moiles knows all thar ways, too. She's towld me a lot about bees an' ants. I'd never ha' bleev'd if she hadn't towld me. Thar's lots o' singin' birds, too. I tell you what it be, sir"—and here Joe looked mysteriously and confidentially at Herbert—"I think every-thing is kinder in love wi' Miss Moiles. She beant a bad looking young laady, sir, be she?" he added, in a lower and almost apologetic tone.

Such a remark coming from Joe, fresh from the muck heap—a fact which was strongly evident to at least two senses—was almost too much for Herbert's gravity, and he smiled.

"Tha do tell me she be a great scholard, sir; but I doan't knowt about that. I beant much of a scholard meself. I never tuk to 't. But tha's one thing I do know, sir, about Miss Moiles, and that is that she be mortal koind—that I do know. I wa' down wi' the faver, sir, the last summer that's gone, sir, and it was she got me through—if anything got me through."* Joe here gave

* Joe Brunning's speech is such as was familiar to Suffolk before the days of Board Schools, with a slight admixture of the Cockney dialect, which he derived from a friend of his, whom he strove to imitate, and to whom he looked up as an authority, because he came from "Lunnun."

his trousers an energetic hitch, and looked rather fierce, as though the fact was being contested. “I knew’d it then, an’ I knew it now. She come every day to see me, and brought me a lot of things I’d never so much as seen afore, much less tasted ; and she brought me a silver spune to eat’em wi’. ‘Joe,’ she say, ‘you must eat um while I staay, ’cause I want to taake back the spune and plaate, and bring them again all bright and clean to-morrow.’ Those were just her words, sir. I’d never had a silver spune in my mouth afore, sir ; that I’ll take my oath on’t. I warn’t born with a silver spune in it, as they say, sir—that I warn’t. Some days she actially bring a saucepan wi’ her, an’ that war for all the world loike silver outside an in ; an’ she maade me some stirabout stuff over the foire her blessed self.” Joe’s recollection at this point seemed to make his voice huskier than usual, and his moist brown hand again passed over his red forehead. “I thow’t then,” he said, in a still lower voice, “that she wor a *Serrafum* who had got down here by mistaake, and I doan’t know, but I think so still. But here we are, sir. You’ll ’scuse me going any further ;

shouldn't loike Miss Moiles to see me jest out
ter muck heap as 't were."

"But I cannot see the signs of any garden,
Joe."

"Ah, well, p'raps she beant looking this
way," and Joe pushed back some long trail-
ing boughs. "Mind your hat, sir. Miss
Moiles wan't have no shears, you see."

Veiled and draped with woodbine and
bindweed, which frolicked over the branches
of a wide-spreading maple, a little rustic
gate peeped out from amid a tall thick hedge
of thorn.

"There's a bell by the side, sir, because
Miss Moiles often locks herself in."

"Thank you very much, Joe."

"Thank *you*, sir," said Joe, grinning as his
dirty palm closed over the silver coin placed
therein, which he slipped into his spacious
pocket with marvellous dexterity. "Thank
you kindly, and good morning, sir."

Fairest among woodland trees—truly a
sylvan Venus, as it has happily been named—
the tall ash which Helen had described as
the landmark of Mary's garden threw out
far and wide its graceful branches, and the
feathery lightness of its foliage was still

untouched by summer's scorching heats. Midway, clambering from bough to bough, as if with ineffectual yet continuous and almost playful efforts, as it seemed, it strove to reach the very top, there hung in profusion festoons of wild clematis, which rejoices also in the charming name of "Travellers' joy." Supported by the strong arms of its chosen companion, it had grown far beyond the ordinary height and size of this hedgerow climber, and had massed itself on the lower boughs with so great an amount of vigour and persistence that they were forced to yield to the persevering gentle pressure, and as strength is conquered by embracing love, bent their branches downwards, inclining to the earth, which the long trailing pendants, covering with smiling blossoms, caressed as the slightest waft of wind waved them hither and thither, as if in sportiveness and glee.

Under the cover of this pleasant shade, not too deep to exclude flickering sunrays, was a little log seat from which the whole garden sloping away could be seen. Like the heroic virtues, which appear to flourish best on rough soils, the hardy perennials, in the gladness of free profusion, hid up the

rubbish and outcasts of Mr. Stevenson's choicer plots.

Here the old-fashioned bush-roses of cottage gardens, covered with blossoms to the very ground, grew in healthy breadth of comely vigour, nor needed staves whereon to lean ; masses of sturdy plants were clumped here and there ; lilies of every kind sprung out from amid tufts of odorous thyme, or patches of purple heather, which was the only carpet bedding. The ruined arch of a disused water-way, which still, however, owned a little limpid thread, ever trickling through it, had offered itself as a fit habitat for the ivy-leaved toadflax, variously named by country folk as "creeping Jenny" and "roving sailor," and this made beautiful the old worn brickwork with its graceful network of fairy silken cords, which, fine as a gossamer spider's web, clung to its rugged home, and hastened to sip with joy the breath of the tiny runlet beneath.

A high hedge of hawthorn, here and there broken by the spindle and wild cornel, in and out of which everywhere disported the wood-bine, girdled this garden of the governess, and shut out all other views. The Eglantine and most of the wild roses, of which there

are so many varieties, here grew or clomb at their ease. It was all redolent of perfume and brightness, and a continuous hum as of the woods filled the air. It was a place to dream in, a place where a weary soul might forget for awhile its oppressing cares. The labour which this cultivated wild required was nowhere visible ; its charm was that it seemed fresh from the hand of Nature.

On the low log seat sat Mary Miles ; her garden gloves—for she had not been gardening—thrust through her waist-belt ; her hands loosely clasped together lying on her lap, where also lay Dr. Grantham's open letter, which we, looking over her shoulder, will take the liberty of reading.

“MY DEAR GIRL,

“I am going away for months, perhaps years, ah ! who knows for how long ? It is the doctor's doing ; for days and days I was obstreperous, as I had not the slightest desire to expatriate myself, but they insisted, even asserting that by so doing my life might be prolonged ten years or more. I doubted at first whether that was worth the while, but one thought of you, my dear girl, prompted me to obey, and to obey at once. I thank God that by acting thus I may

relieve your gentle heart of a probable burden. Yes, I thank God for your sake more than my own that my life has been mercifully preserved through this attack. I shudder to think how, if I had succumbed, you might have tortured yourself by unjust fears. Many, many thanks, noblest and dearest of women, for all your sweet courtesies and loving tenderness on that terrible day. The medical dictum that sealed, as it seemed, my death warrant, and which to some might have brought some pain, was to me a joy, as though it had been the promise of life and health. ‘The disease was of long standing.’ Thank God! and I had been saved from intending you a grievous wrong. When I think of it as I write I am filled with emotions of gratitude to the good God who preserved me from so doing. A lovely woman in the pride of youth, richly endowed with every intellectual gift, might have been sacrificed—I say *might* in a qualified sense—if you had not been true to yourself, or if you had been weak and allowed the piteousness of your nature, and your unwillingness to give pain, to override, as is too often the case with women, your truth and justice. Thank

God! thank God! I can look back now, Mary, to that morning as though then I had passed over the borderland between my lower and my higher nature—not from life to death, but from death to life. I loved you then, God knows how dearly! I love you now infinitely more, but it is as the love of Dante for his Beatrice, or, if you prefer another simile, the love of a widowed father for his only daughter, which you, had I married in the ripeness of my manhood, could well have been.

“ You must not think that I am degenerating into a rhapsodical old man; these overflowing words, these, to use a modern expression, gushing phrases, will not be repeated, but I wrong you. Deep down behind the Athene-like calm of your outward demeanour is a heart aglow with the warmest emotions. To you now I can speak freely, and *you* will not misinterpret me—you will read and listen without any dread of future self-seeking from me. I am full of overflowing gratitude. I cannot say, as some disappointed men have said under similar circumstances—would that I had never seen you. I bless God that I have seen you. I bless God for that first vision of you, years

ago, when you burst upon me like the realization of an old dream. I bless God that I have known you, that I have loved you, that I love you still. It is as if a flood of heavenly harmonies had entered my soul by you. As once after hearing Beethoven's sublime 'Pastoral Symphony' I bowed my heart and knees at night in thankfulness to the great God who had bestowed such gifts on men, so do I daily bless His holy name for you, Mary.

"Now, an end to rhapsody and gushing. I am going first to the Italian lakes. Fletcher goes with me; he is a faithful and tried, as well as a capable servant. My dearly-loved books will be all covered up, and my library will be kept locked. Had you been likely to remain at Sunnyside I should have asked you to take charge of the key, and to see that Henderson occasionally aired it properly, but as it stands I have handed over that friendly office to our good Vicar. Regarding your projected departure from Sunnyside, which you confided to me, I think it is well thought of. Your high attainments in the classics are buried there. You have done well by Helen, and she has benefited much by your knowledge of the

modern languages, and by your moral influence ; but the offer made to you is a good one. In a few years there will be less opportunity of securing such a position, as there will be more ladies who will be duly qualified, or else I should hesitate in speaking as I do. You are almost too young for such a post with all that it involves, and I do sincerely hope that you will before long become the wife of some man worthy of you, if such a man can possibly be found. I shall write to you from Florence. My intention at present is to winter at Athens—an excellent place, they say, for patients like myself. It is the thought of visiting Greece that makes the contemplation of abandoning my home, surroundings, and my friends even temporarily tolerable. Devoted as I have been through life to those great writers, I shall tread the ground their feet have trodden with a kind of ecstasy. The difficulty will be to keep down my enthusiasm, and to be quiet, as I am commanded to be. I shall not, however, when in Greece live wholly in the past. I shall study the present race, the living sons of that poor Greece once so great and then so humbled in the dust. I shall see and judge for myself. I know you

share with me my hopes and sympathies as regards the little Greece of our own day. Write to me, my daughter, my friend, from time to time, and tell me all; an old man's advice may perhaps be of use sometimes. Once in two months will not overtax your leisure hours. Remember me heartily to Mrs. Hazelhurst and Helen. Tell them that wherever I may be I shall often think of them with affectionate regard, and tell them also that I am not responsible for this apparently barbarous behaviour, for this rude, ill-mannered departure. I am under orders, and I was enjoined to have no leave-takings, to say to none, Good-bye.

“It is almost as much a discovery to myself as to my physicians to find that I am not a grave phlegmatic scholar, imperturbable, and calm, but really and truly a nervous old man. May a thousand blessings attend you. Farewell.

“Ever yours sincerely,

“GEORGE GRANTHAM.

“By-the-bye, what a thoroughly fine fellow is Mrs. Hazelhurst's nephew.”

With reverent attention Miss Myles read and reread this letter. The shadows that

hovered over her face seemed to come more from awe than grief. "Kind, good, and true," she said, as she laid the letter upon her lap and crossed her hands upon it.

And she sat upon the low log seat, gravely musing, while the minutes sped on and on. She looked athwart her little paradise of flowers and sweet scents, of pleasant buzzings and twitterings of gladsome life, and the shadows died away, and the sunshine stole out by degrees from behind the filmy clouds.

"What a thoroughly fine fellow is Mrs. Hazelhurst's nephew."

It was not an abstruse proposition, nor one that required much scholarship to unravel, but over that postscript Miss Myles had been drifting into hitherto unexplored regions of feeling rather than of thought.

"A thoroughly fine fellow!"

A smile swept over her face.

"And he loves me," she said to herself, and at that juncture of her ideas, she heard her gate bell tinkle.

"That's Joe!" she cried, and at the unromantic image of Joe suddenly brought before her, reveries and daydreams fled. She put the letter, postscript and all, into her pocket and walked leisurely towards the entrance.

“Plenty of work for us both,” she said, as she glanced around.

She turned the key and opened the gate.

“Mr. Langridge!” she plucked her hat quickly over her brows. “I thought—I thought it was Joe.”

“I have taken Helen’s advice, Miss Myles, and have come to offer my services in weeding your garden.”

“I could not trust you to weed, I do not trust even Joe to weed.”

“Even Joe,” repeated the young man. The comparison with Joe of the muck heap seemed ludicrous, and he laughed.

“Why do you laugh at poor Joe’s name? He is just what I want, he does exactly what I tell him, and no more; he does not think what he had better do, but obeys.”

“And so will I, if I do not know flowers from weeds. Well—perhaps I can dig, or—anything you like.”

“There is no digging to be done, but come in, and at least see my garden. I myself am not inclined to-day for work,” and she turned back up the little path, followed by Herbert, who felt that he had been snubbed.

“What a thoroughly fine fellow is Mrs. Hazelhurst’s nephew.” That postscript

would repeat itself unasked. What could Dr. Grantham want to put that in as a sequel to his letter for ?

“ It is rather too hot for work, Mr. Langridge. I have a little bower where I sit sometimes and read, or pretend to do so, for a garden after all is not a place for real reading. Emerson is right in that.” But Herbert felt that he had been snubbed, and thought that Joe after all would have been the person whom she would have preferred to see at the gate.

“ Will you not come into my bower, Mr. Langridge ?”

How sweetly those words of invitation fell upon his ear. He looked her in the face, it was lighted up with smiles, and she blushed as her eyes met his.

“ I am very sorry,” she said, turning away, “ but there is only a seat for one; I had forgotten that.”

“ May I not lie on this dry moss at your feet ?” asked the young man, somewhat emboldened by her manner. She knew that she had snubbed him, she who was generally so gracious, and she wished to make amends.

“ Why not ?” she said, and she sat down demurely on the log, and there was silence.

A very young man and a lovely woman, in a garden alone, the one ardently in love—first love—the purest of all loves, and the other conscious of that love, and not rebuking it—how could it not but foster a quicker growth, if such were needed to cement it?

And there was silence ; neither looked at the other, but some electric current simultaneously carried both their thoughts to that first day at the chestnuts.

The tips of two little feet pressed the moss almost on a level with Herbert's eyes. She felt rather than saw this, and drew them gently beneath her gown. And still the postscript of Dr. Grantham's letter kept repeating itself, with the persistency of a jingling rhyme or musical jig, which Locke so pertinently says a well regulated mind should at once be able to dismiss.

“ What a delicious place you have made of this, Miss Myles,” said Herbert, breaking the silence, and raising himself on one elbow. “ This is as charming as the grotto of Calypso.”

“ A grotto! Mr. Langridge, do you call this a grotto ? I always thought a grotto was of stone, damp, drippy, and uncomfortable,” said Mary, smiling, inwardly glad that the

silence was interrupted by so inapt a comparison. "And Calypso's grotto too! Well, I think it is hardly entitled to be called an arbour; see how the sunrays come through everywhere. I like sunshine better than shade; but I have been thinking all this time what garden work I could give you." Truthful, clear-souled Mary Myles, was that true? She rose as she made that statement. "We will go and see," she said. And when Herbert, obedient to her summons, also started to his feet, she added softly, with a somewhat averted face, "If those interwoven boughs, Mr. Langridge, reminded you of Calypso's grotto, wherever that might have been, I hope that there is nothing in me to remind you of Calypso, or any of her class?"

"No, no; it was a very stupid thing to say. If I wanted to make a comparison I ought to have said a hamadryad's bower," said the young man, eagerly.

"No, I am not a hamadryad," she replied, gravely; "I am only Mary Myles, the governess."

And she left him to follow her.

Stopping before the trunk of a tree from which a storm had torn the upper stem and branches, she turned to him —

“ You look very strong, after all,” she said; “ I forgot that you had rowed with the Oxford eight. I really believe that you would find no difficulty in cutting this down, and digging up the stump for a second rustic stool for my arbour. It looks so inhospitable not to have a seat for a guest. You will tell me frankly at once if you dislike such a task, will you not, Mr. Langridge?”

To work for her, to do something for her, to make another seat for his hamadryad’s retreat was altogether the one thing which at that moment was able to bring more joy into Herbert’s heart than aught which it had known for some weeks. His nature was no nature especially adapted for lengthened, dreamy contemplations, any more than that of Miss Myles. He was eager to begin. Where were the tools? Mary turned to fetch them.

“ You cannot carry them; let me go for them.”

“ I am not feeble,” said Mary, laughing; but they both went together.

Mary, however, when the tools were brought could only do the looking on part, but her spirits rose as she gazed on the noble and athletic figure of Herbert with his upraised axe; and she was glad that he and

not Joe was before her, whilst the postscript of Dr. Grantham's letter was now remembered with a physical interpretation. "What a thoroughly fine fellow!"

"I think I should like to live in a log hut which I had seen built," she said, simply, following up a train of ideas.

"Should you?" answered Herbert, and his axe paused as he looked in her face, whilst a new and sudden thought rushed through his mind.

At that moment a booming, long protracted metallic sound was borne by the breeze.

"The gong for luncheon!" cried Mary. "We must go."

She turned away and walked down the narrow path, he following. The gate was reached, and her hand was upon the latch.

"Will you not give me one flower from your garden?" he asked, tremulously.

"Gladly," she answered. "Wait here, I will go back and gather you some roses."

"No, not roses; pluck me some mary-golds."

She did not ask the reason of that preference, but went without a word. The mary-golds were gorgeous in their golden profu-

sion, a very “laugh of Nature,” as Herbert happily called them afterwards. In a few moments she came back with a large bunch clasped in both her ungloved hands.

“I have brought you a great many, Mr. Langridge, because they look best in masses, especially if we can find a dark-blue jar or bowl wherein to place them. But if you do not care for so large a bunch, pick out those you prefer,” and she held them out to him.

She looked so bright and happy. Herbert did not take the flowers, but his strong, nervous hands closed round those which were holding the marygolds.

“Mary!” he said.

CHAPTER X.

O, bliss of blissful hours !
The boon of heaven's decreeing,
While yet in Eden's bowers
Dwelt the first husband and his sinless mate !
The one sweet plant, which, piteous heaven agreeing,
They bore with them through Eden's closing gate.

COLERIDGE.

“ONCE again, Parker.”

And for the third time the gong resounded under Parker's vigorous manipulation, causing Mrs. Hazelhurst and Helen, who were both standing in the porch, to hold their ears, laughing all the time.

“Here come the two gardeners at last,” cried Helen. “And see, mother, Herbert has actually got his hands full of marygolds.”

Mrs. Hazelhurst held out her watch with a gentle smile of reproach as the “two gardeners,” with deprecating gestures, hurried towards the house.

“Whatever do you intend to do with those marygolds, Herbert? Could not Miss Myles’s garden supply you with any better posy than that?”

“I chose them mine own self, my dear aunt. They are a veritable laugh of Nature—strong, bright, and true. There are no concealed thorns behind a mask of beauty in them. See now,” cried Herbert, gaily, as he held them up against the deep purple portière, “see how they stand out and light up that sombre background. Find me a dark-blue basin or pot to place them in, Helen. They will bring sunshine to my room in the cloudiest days.”

“But they have a most abominable smell,” remarked Mrs. Hazelhurst. “Surely you do not intend to have them in your bedroom?”

“Do I not. A blue vase, dear Helen, and you shall see.”

Helen looked full into her cousin’s face with wide open eyes, for his boyish, light-hearted manner seemed suddenly to have reasserted itself.

“I know where there is one which will do admirably,” and as she skipped away to seek it her clear girlish treble voice rung out —

When winking marybuds begin to ope their golden eyes.

Alone in her room—Herbert and Helen out riding together, and Mrs. Hazelhurst writing letters—Mary reviewed all that had occurred since the morning, whereby it seemed that from that time all her whole life was henceforth changed, and a new life, gorgeous with rainbow tints, had begun. She had seen the cousins go forth; the merry laugh of Helen came floating through her open window, but she did not look forth therefrom to wave her hand to Helen as she would have done heretofore. As they turned off from the drive a bright manly face had eagerly sought that lattice, and her heart beat quicker as she saw that glance, although she shrunk back behind the summer curtains as if to shroud her joy even from herself.

“Mine for ever and ever,” was the refrain now ringing in her ears, and not Dr. Grant-ham’s postscript.

“For ever and ever!” Mary softly repeated the words, “Yea, by God’s grace, through all eternity—through all eternity. I have found thee at last, my love, my own heart’s lord,” and she covered her face with her hands, and wept for gladness.

What was there so potent in that single word “Mary” that had in a second, cast

down the watch and ward she had held so long over all emotion? Unknowing to herself, however, the small seeds of love had been sown in her breast on that day when they had met at the chestnuts, and had impelled the wearing of his gift of blue-bells.

At the mere sound of her name from his lips she had looked up with a smile, and the words rushed tumultuously from him.

“Do you then love me a little, Mary?”

And her own true self had spoken out, when with uplifted face and clear tones she had said unfalteringly —

“I do nothing by littles, Herbert.”

“But you cannot love me much—not much.” His muscular hands grasped hers till they almost winced, “not much?” but she, still looking at him, said —

“I love you very dearly, Herbert,” whereat the marygolds were scattered far and wide as he clasped her to his breast.

“I have found my hamadryad again; she is my own for ever—for ever!”

Then they heard the gong again, when they both, with hearts overbrimming with joy, knelt down to gather up the far-dispersed marygolds, the accomplishment of

which, from many interruptions, was unavoidably delayed.

“How good! how trustful! how generous!” she exclaimed, as she raised her head. “He asked no questions, he made no cross-examinations, he did not inquire whether I had ever known ‘a previous affection,’ that stereotyped question of small and jealous natures. You believe in me, and I give you my whole self—my whole self forthwith, and will follow you over the whole world,” and her gaze went forth from the little window of her study, over the tall tree tops to some distant land where she imagined suddenly a home more free, a life more buoyant. “I can do so much,” she cried aloud, as the bright future as she imagined it, sunned her face; “he has yet to learn that I am no mere bookworm.”

In her delirium of love she forgot all the means for the end; she thought not of his mother, nor of Mrs. Hazelhurst, nor the half pledge she had made elsewhere. She forgot all for awhile in one half-hour’s dream of delight, but the whole train of responsibilities, and a gnarl of duties to be unravelled and made smooth, came back then with unmistakable distinctness. Her lover was Mrs.

Hazelhurst's nephew, and Mrs. Hazelhurst, her employer, had, as she well knew, destined him for his cousin—her pupil—her much-beloved Helen, with the approbation also of his mother. As this truth burst vividly upon her, her cheek blanched. “But he has never heard of the bond, and the child is heart free. Oh, Helen! my darling, had I seen but the faintest glimmer of a nascent affection in your young virginal heart I would have ruthlessly extinguished that torch of love so quickly lighted in your cousin's breast; yes, ruthlessly, even to the blighting of my life. Supplant you, dear child! No, thank God, I have not supplanted you. Had he and I never met I doubt if your cousin would have loved you; but, had it, could it have been otherwise, rather than sow the seeds of sorrow in that sweet girl's bosom, I might, God knows, have taken the first remedy at hand, and might have married Dr. Grantham, and lived out my life for ever after for duty, for duty without the sun-gleams of love. Passion never has, and never shall rule me, nor lead me astray.”

As she thought thus, calm again settled upon her countenance—that same slightly stern but sweet look, which sometimes domi-

nated over the habitually softer expression, and which had led Dr. Grantham to compare her to Athene.

Under this sobered mood she considered what were her relations with Mrs. Hazelhurst, and resolved at once that whilst under her roof, she would not again meet her nephew as a lover, and determined, in order to emancipate herself from the duties which now seemed to her like heavy chains, to write to Chippenham by that evening's mail, and accept the offered post provisionally. "And to you, also, I must write, my dear old friend, and open my heart, and tell you all the honest truth ; but before God I did not lie to you when I said to you on that bitter day—so bitter for you and for me also—that I did not love another man, though I could not be your wife," and her eyes filled with tears. "I knew not, when I thus spoke, that my heart was full of a newly-found love."

"Gardening seems to suit you, Herbert," said Mrs. Hazelhurst, as the coffee was being handed round after dinner. "For the first time since you have been down here your brows are not contracted, and there is a brightness in your eye and a glow upon your

cheeks that have never made their appearance before. We must try the recipe again. Did you find him a good gardener, Miss Myles?"

"It was not gardening that I was required to do this morning, aunt," said the young man, hastening to Miss Myles's rescue, "it was more the work of a woodman; and as it only required strength, I was able to compete successfully with Joe. I was told to cut down the trunk of a tree, and I did cut it down; so I presume that I may claim to have achieved a success so far."

He looked across the table as he spoke as if for approval.

"A perfect success," said Mary, smiling.

"Your old pupil, Miss Myles," resumed Mrs. Hazelhurst, "is actually coming home for the remainder of his vacation—Reginald Ashcroft," she said, turning to her nephew. "He seldom now, to the great vexation of his parents, passes his holidays here; but in consequence of a letter from his mother acquainting him that you are now with us and lovingly urging him to comply with his father's and her wishes, he is actually coming in a few days. We will then try and be a little more gay; it has been terribly dull for you on account of Dr. Grantham's illness.

You will be very glad to see him, will you not?"

"Yes," said Herbert, absently.

Why did Miss Myles blush?

"I do not think that you have seen him, Miss Myles," continued Mrs. Hazelhurst, "since he won the honours which you helped him to gain. I cannot imagine how he could prove so ungrateful."

"He was not ungrateful," said Mary, as the blush died away, "for he gained the honours I wished for him."

"Mrs. Ashcroft tells me that he is to be ordained deacon at the coming ordination, and he has already got a curacy, whilst a living is promised him at no distant date after he has taken priest's orders. All your doing, Miss Myles, for he was the idlest of the idle until you took him in hand."

Mary faintly smiled, but did not raise her eyes from the tablecloth.

Mrs. Hazelhurst had withdrawn her arm from that of her nephew to caress her favourite St. Bernard dog, and Helen had run to the schoolroom to fetch some music, so Herbert and Miss Myles had entered the drawing-room together.

Did her eyes deceive her? Was the hand of her governess really resting upon her nephew's shoulder as they stood side by side in the bay window in earnest conversation? Mrs. Hazelhurst paused; the white, well-formed hand was conspicuous enough on his black coat, and it was not hastily withdrawn as Mrs. Hazelhurst closed the door with some force. It was Mrs. Hazelhurst's turn now to colour, and that she did vividly over both cheek and brow; but Mary did not blench under the half-indignant and surprised look bent upon her. She slowly turned from the window and approached the chair into which Mrs. Hazelhurst had thrown herself, and drawing out a low seat—one of those three-legged horrors called a milking stool—sat herself down by her side in silence; for Mrs. Hazelhurst, almost ignoring her presence, was looking straight before her, wondering whether "a woman of the people"—for she had never become reconciled to that expression—thought nothing of confidently laying her hand on a boy's shoulder. The burden of Mrs. Hazelhurst's reflection was, "I thought she had been more discreet."

Helen returning with her music, Herbert

at once walked to the piano to turn over the leaves ; and while she played with much grace and fidelity Beethoven's charming andante in F, the transient anger of Mrs. Hazelhurst—with whom anger, as has been already observed, was always transient—evaporated, and she turned to Miss Myles on the stool beside her.

“ Helen does you much credit, Miss Myles, in her playing, as in everything else.”

As she spoke she looked in the face of her governess, which was raised to her, and for the first time recognized what a beautiful face it was—features, colour, and expression all in such perfect harmony. She felt annoyed, not pleased at this tardy discovery, and glanced from her to the tall, well-developed figure of her nephew. “ Dear me, he is a man of thirty compared with others of his age,” was the result of this investigation ; and the summing-up was, “ No more felling of trees in Miss Myles’s garden.”

“ It would do Helen very much good now if you could take her abroad,” were the undertones which fell upon her ear.

“ I have thought so for some time, Miss Myles, but hardly liked to mention it, although it was included in some plans

which, unfortunately, Providence has not destined should be fulfilled."

" You have always been so kind, dear Mrs. Hazelhurst," said Mary, laying one hand on Mrs. Hazelhurst's, which were clasped together on her knees; " but all your kind forbearance need no longer be exercised to Helen's detriment. I have had the offer of an appointment which will spare you every anxiety on my account, and which by my acceptance leaves us both perfectly free."

" Indeed? May I ask to what you refer? " said Mrs. Hazelhurst, somewhat bewildered.

" I am appointed, conditionally upon my willingness to accept it, to the post of head mistress at the Chippenham College for girls, and I have accepted it, also conditionally."

Mrs. Hazelhurst would have preferred to have taken the initiative in any projected separation, a weakness common to human nature both in employers and employed, so she answered, with some slight touch of asperity —

" When do you wish to leave, Miss Myles? "

" Your convenience and yours alone need be consulted. It will be a wrench whenever it takes place."

“On both sides,” said Mrs. Hazelhurst, gently, as she patted her governess’s hand. “Say nothing to Helen ; I will think it over.”

After a few moments’ silence, during which their ears drank in the ebb and flow of that pathetic strain, Miss Myles resumed —

“I feel that I can do nothing more for dear Helen.”

“That assertion I cannot, and will not, endorse, dear Miss Myles ; but for yourself, it is no doubt much to be desired that you should be placed where your classical knowledge can be made available.”

The last tender phrase of the closing movement died away, and there was a hushed and not unappreciative pause. Herbert bent down smilingly to his cousin and whispered praises in her ears. The girl was pleased, but generously turned and nodded to her governess, as if to say : “It is your doing,” supplementing it with —

“Come and sing ‘Lascia, ch’ io pianga,’ dear Miss Myles. Herbert has never heard you sing anything that is really good.”

“Not to-night, dear Helen ; I am not quite in the mood for singing. Give us another of Beethoven’s andante movements.

We are having a nice little chat here by ourselves, and can listen to you all the same."

Mary looked up to Mrs. Hazelhurst for approval, who smiled assent, and pressing the hand laid in one of hers, warmed anew to her governess on account of Helen's delicate touch and rendering.

Herbert, however, crossed over from the piano, and without saying a word put out his hand with an air of gentle authority in order to lead her to the instrument, and Mary immediately obeyed, and resigning her hand to him, rose and went to the piano in silence.

Mrs. Hazelhurst saw it all.

"Play the accompaniment for me, Helen dear," she said, softly.

Helen had been taught to accompany, and did so well. As the recitative ended, Mrs. Hazelhurst involuntarily fixed her eyes upon the singer.

"Why, she is perfectly beautiful!" she said to herself. "How was it that I never saw it before? It must be the change in wearing her hair, and she has on that same creamy Indian gown which she wore when she finished off poor Dr. Grantham."

Mary's arm had stolen round Helen's

shoulders during the recitative. She was moved, she felt that the burning enraptured looks of the young man were rivetted upon her face. To hide the emotion which filled her eyes with tears, she stooped her head low at the conclusion and kissed Helen on the forehead.

“Helen is a perfect accompanist,” she said, as waiving Herbert’s offered hand she had glided back to Mrs. Hazelhurst’s side. “Do you not think so, dear Mrs. Hazelhurst? I never sang with so much pleasure before.”

“Doubtless,” said Mrs. Hazelhurst, dryly.

CHAPTER XI.

A temper known to those who, after long
And weary expectation, have been blessed
With sudden happiness beyond all hope.

WORDSWORTH.

“So I shall see my old pupil again,” said Mary, when alone. “I suppose by this time that he is heart-free, whole, and in his right mind.”

Even the best of women can hardly regard with satisfaction that moment when a former lover is supposed to have slipped off his chains.

“He has heard something from Mrs. Ashcroft,” she continued, as if almost to excuse him. “Doubtless she wrote and told him that I was about to marry Dr. Grantham. Ah! that news would effectually blow away any love sentiment still lingering in his

heart. But I am free from any blame as regards him. I never gave him any hope. I even think it would have been more in the bounds of possibility to marry dear Dr. Grantham rather than Reginald Ashcroft, who ever remains in my memory as a younger brother, and will, I think, always seem to me a boy, until he emerges before me some day a full-blown portly rector, with a well-grown beard, if such be his taste; and yet I would rather not meet him just now. I vexed him so by calling him a boy; he thought his youth was the only obstacle—and now I have given my heart to one two years his junior! I hope he is quite cured, otherwise he may think himself injured; but between Reginald and Herbert, who could halt before forming an opinion? Not I, certainly."

Yes, it was quite evident that Mrs. Ashcroft had written to Reginald, and had told him that she was engaged to be married to Dr. Grantham. That was fully evident, and the bonds that her fair-haired boy lover of nearly five years back had made for himself were loosed, and he was coming. Such was the turn that Mary's musings took that afternoon. He was now a man, and no

longer the lad of eighteen, who had told her so quietly one morning —

“ All this hard work and poring over books and striving after honours is only for one purpose. I hate study as much as ever I did. You can guess what it is, I suppose, Miss Myles ? ”

Miss Myles was at that moment absorbed in correcting his theme, with eyes bent on the paper, and had not noticed that the expression of his countenance was somewhat more animated than the subject seemed to demand, and therefore she only carelessly answered, without raising her eyes —

“ There can be but one reason — you intend to pass.”

“ It means a good deal more than that,” he said, stammering.

“ I am glad of that. You intend to pass with honours. I thought you would be roused at last,” she said, smiling, as she dipped her pen in the ink, still without looking up.

“ You have inked your white fingers with that nasty pen of mine,” said the boy, hurriedly, getting a little flurried.

“ Yes, it is a bad pen, certainly. But, Reginald ” — and here she raised her head and regarded him with manifest surprise —

“ what is the matter with you this morning ? If you are going to get nervous and begin to stammer and blush at the *viva voce* examination you will fare badly and disappoint us all. But let go my fingers—see, you have inked your own,” and Miss Myles laughed.

“ Don’t laugh at me. Can’t you see—can’t you see—that I love you,” cried the boy, “ and that I’m doing all this only for you—only for you ! ”

She looked at him wonderingly, but very gravely—“ A mere boy,” she thought.

“ Release my hand, Reginald, and go on with your work. You are behaving very foolishly.”

“ Foolishly ! foolishly ! in loving you ! Of course, you think I am only a boy, and you despise me.”

“ In considering you only a boy I make no mistake, I think, and as for holding you in contempt I must tell you, Reginald, that my respect has been growing for you every day, seeing how you have worked hitherto.”

“ It is only on your account that I have worked,” said the boy, doggedly.

“ I have not troubled myself to investigate on what account you have worked. You are my pupil, and you must not trifle with my

time as you are now doing, or I shall throw up all my responsibilities as regards you, and leave the Vicarage to-morrow."

" You are very hard and cold, Miss Myles ! Have you no feeling at all for me ? "

" I have the greatest interest in you."

" Nothing more ? "

" Well, affection, if you like that term better, but we are wasting time."

" You must know how beautiful you are, Miss Myles. You must know a fellow couldn't help falling in love with you. It isn't my fault. Who could help it ? "

" Pass me that lexicon," said Miss Myles, coldly.

" Do you think that some day you could—well, do you think that when I am older you would let me love you ? " he said, choking a little.

" I have never given that suggestion a moment's thought, and am not disposed to do so, Reginald."

" How angry you are ! But suppose—suppose I work twice as hard as ever and get all kinds of honours, do you think that then—"

" I really do not know. Get the honours first, Reginald, and then—"

“Are you jeering me?”

Miss Myles was touched at the tone.

“I never jeer if I know it. Well, then, in five or six years hence, when you have gained all your honours, it will be quite time enough to reconsider the question.

“Then you do give me some hopes?”

“Yes, yes, on one condition, that for the next few weeks—so long as I am your coach, do you understand—you never again renew this—” She was going to say folly, but she checked herself. “Give me that book, there’s a dear boy.”

Could anything be more insulting to a youthful lover than to be so addressed: “There’s a dear boy?”

Reginald Ashcroft had by nature an even, sweet, and almost imperturbable temper, but this was too much, he could not answer, and his lip quivered.

Mary pushed away the books.

“We will have no more study to-day; to-morrow you will be more reasonable, dear Reginald—let me so call you still; you have been in my heart like a younger brother. You know how very recently I have lost my mother. My mother was my all—parent, brother, sister, friends, kith and kin—my

all. Now, see"—she laid the hand which he had released upon his arm—"I came here with my heart full of grief. I found kind friends in your father and mother, and a brother, as I thought, in yourself, and a younger brother, too, which was still better. Four years, Reginald, make a great gap between any woman and a boy; but between yourself and me a still greater gap than, perhaps, with many others. I have lived away from home. I have suffered. You have known no sorrow; you have not even had the discipline of the short separations from home which boys have who have been entirely educated at public schools; so you are more inexperienced and younger on that account." She paused, and then with a slight tremor in her voice, said, "Do not let me lose you, Reginald."

"You *will* let me love you, then? And in three or four years—"

Mary knitted her handsome brows.

"In three or four years there will be the same obstacle as now. I shall still be as many years your elder, and you will still be very young."

"Oh, I shall never change—never!" cried the boy; "and if you don't see anyone you

like better—perhaps—well, for my part, I swear that—”

“Hush! Here, take the sponge and wipe off the ink stain your ill-conditioned pen has made,” and she held out her hand.

He wiped out the blot on the fair page, but his young lips kissed the cleansed little hand before he released it.

“That will do,” said Mary, laughing; “now it is over; and never again repeat this, there’s a dear boy.”

That obnoxious phrase again! And she rose from the table to leave the room.

As she passed him where he sat, with elbows on the table and his head in his hands, she lightly laid one palm on his fair curls.

“For my sake, work; it will bring you honour if it does not give you love.”

And this episode was not repeated. Miss Myles put in a little more of the rigidity of manner which she could well assume when needed, and it now stood her in good stead; but the boy treasured up those last words of hers in his heart.

He gained the scholarship. Mr. and Mrs. Ashcroft, in their gratitude, felt as if they could almost worship the girl coach who had so transformed their lazy Reginald into the

most indefatigable of workers, and the secret was kept, and the successful candidate did not betray himself.

Miss Myles had left the Vicarage immediately upon a visit before entering on her new engagement with Mrs. Hazelhurst. She had carefully avoided any opportunity for meeting, but a short note reached her from Oxford.

“ DEAREST MISS MYLES,

“ My success is yours. I am bound to you for life.

“ Ever your grateful and devoted lover,
“ REGINALD.”

To which Mary had answered almost as briefly —

“ MY DEAR REGINALD,

“ I rejoice with you from the depths of my heart. I desire not to meet you for at least four or five years, and any gratitude that you think you owe me will be best shown by the observance of my wish. Meanwhile, I consider myself quite free, and own no bonds but those of sister and friend.

“ Your well-wisher,

“ MARY MYLES.”

Reginald Ashcroft had, however, a dogged

pertinacity in his character. His boyish love had none of the impassioned fire of Herbert's, but it was tenacious : it held him to his work, and it kept him safe from all temptations, but it did not cost him sleepless nights. He steadily set himself to work out a kind of programme that he had made for himself. This first success had so inspirited him that laziness was no longer possible. Meanwhile he rowed and he played cricket as well as studied ; he had a sufficiently fair estimate of himself to countenance a belief that eventually he should succeed in making Mary Myles love him as a natural and well-deserved sequel to his constancy.

As months rolled into years his love took the form of sentiment rather than passion, but it was sentiment held with an obstinate adherence. The praises so amply bestowed upon his fair tutor by his father in almost every letter kept her memory ever before him in fresh and vivid colours. The time was not weary—college life was very pleasant. He took as much interest in his work, and pursued so dogged and persistent a course that, although it was not to be expected that he would become a brilliant light there, yet he took his degree, and sometimes dared to

think of a fellowship. It was a strange position. He was obstinately determined to keep his word till five years had passed. He did not, now that he was older, think of himself as the accepted lover of Mary Myles. No other form had come before him to render her less attractive than of old. He even thought it possible, sometimes, perhaps probable, that she might hereafter accept him, so that, as far as he was concerned, there seemed to be a likelihood that, if Miss Myles did not bestow her affections elsewhere, there would be another of those half-and-half engagements which sometimes go on moulder-
ing year after year till youth merges into middle age, whilst the promised benefice or the expected post is still in abeyance.

Reginald Ashcroft was in all things doing that which his father most desired, and which to please that father Miss Myles had so often placed before him as an ultimate duty. He intended to take holy orders. No disturbing elements in reference to Mary often obtruded themselves now. He knew that he could not make her his wife at any very near period if he should ultimately win her consent. He hardly doubted that his constancy would meet its due reward some day when his thoughts

went seriously in that direction, but meanwhile he had so much to do. He knew that he must work harder than some men to get the same results, and so he entirely gave himself up to study in the quiet, persistent way which was possible for him, and which was first made evident when his heart was set only upon winning the approval of his girl instructress. But his mother had in no slight measure disturbed this habitual equipoise by announcing to him some weeks previously that it was rumoured that Dr. Grantham was on the eve of proposing to Miss Myles, and that it was confidently believed that his proposals would be well received.

It was a momentary shock to his sense of justice, and it shook a little his exalted estimation of the character of a woman who had lost none of the attributes of his ideal, although he could imagine sometimes the possibility after all that she might never be his wife, and that he might eventually call another lady by that name. Dr. Grantham was wealthy. Could Mary Myles, with that noble brow and those clear eyes, be mercenary? He had thought her the personification of the very spirit of poetry. Could there be any gleam of such a realization in

portly Dr. Grantham? He had the advantage of age, certainly, and he recalled with some annoyance how he had been repeatedly apostrophized as "a dear boy."

He was disappointed.

"Of course she was not bound to me in the slightest way. She was free, and quite free to marry Dr. Grantham. But I did not think it of her," he said, half aloud, and then he thought how very loyal he had been to her every wish—how for four years he had avoided meeting her. "There is no occasion to do so any longer," he said, testily; "I am no longer bound by anything I said, and therefore I shall go and finish off my holidays at the Vicarage with the dear old folks at home!"

And this decision was hardly arrived at, when another letter, evidently hastily written, came from his mother telling him that it was all a mistake, that there had never been an engagement, and that Dr. Grantham had gone abroad for some time, adding—

"The gloom that has been enveloping us all on account of Dr. Grantham's ill-health has vanished before the prospect of seeing our dear boy at last. We are all so glad that you are coming before Herbert leaves, but we have seen little or nothing even of him as yet."

CHAPTER XII.

Tantæne animis cœlestibus iræ?

VIRGIL.

MRS. LANGRIDGE was sitting at her breakfast-table. Some newspapers and a pile of letters had been brought in and were lying beside her. She hastily tossed them all aside to see if there was one amongst them from her “dear boy.” Yes, there was one underneath all the others, when it ought to have been on the top. What were a thousand letters from friends compared to one from him? The handsome woman, still in the prime of life, smiled a happy satisfied smile, as she tore open the envelope, and leaned back in her chair the more thoroughly to enjoy the perusal of its contents, slowly drinking in each precious word.

“I suppose he will tell me here on what day he intends returning,” she said, half

aloud, ere she began to read the following lines :—

“ MY DEAREST MOTHER,

“ You have often twitted me with being ‘prosaic,’ ‘matter-of-fact,’ as not having ‘a grain of poetry in me,’ with other like phrases. You will not need to call me so any longer. I have awakened to that higher life, and breathe in a new atmosphere. Not to keep you in suspense, dear, dear and best of mothers, I am in love—in love, too, with the sweetest type of womanhood the world has ever seen. You will love her almost as much as I do—if that be possible, for she is far dearer to me than my own life—but, anyhow, you will, and must, love her, firstly, because you are an admirer of all that is high-minded and noble, and secondly, because you must needs love one who is part of my own life. I almost think I was possessed by the very genius of poetry the very moment I beheld her, for fancy, dearest mother, it was a veritable wood-nymph I fell in love with—a wood-nymph asleep on the grass !

“ Happily for me I had to descend from the exalted pedestal of loving a creature of some other sphere, for I soon found out to my everlasting joy that she was a veritable

woman. I could not have married a hamadryad, you know ; but I am pledged to marry sweet Mary Myles, for the wood-nymph turned out to be Helen's governess. Miss Myles is two or three years older than I am, I believe, which is a good thing, you will say, as I suppose I am 'ower young' to contemplate matrimony. Nevertheless, I do intend to marry the moment I reach one-and-twenty. I know that you will rejoice with me in my happiness, and do your utmost to forward it, you best of all possible mothers ! I long to introduce you to Mary, and as I knew that it was my duty to tell this news to you first, I have said nothing to my aunt, and shall await your reply before doing so. But why can you not come over—that would be better still ? Miss Myles is as pretty as she is accomplished. Pretty, do I say ? That is not the word. She is as beautiful as a Grecian statue, with the fresh loveliness of an Englishwoman superadded. I believe she is also very, very learned, but I only know her as an angel. I think I shall be blessed above all men to call two such women as yourself and her, mother and wife.

“ Ever your devoted son,

“ HERBERT.”

Mrs. Langridge had opened this letter with a smile. The smile was suddenly quenched at the fifth line.

“ You goose,” she said, pausing, “ I did not want you to begin love-making thus prematurely. I suppose it has happened through my sister’s imprudence in throwing the young people too much together. How tiresome ! He’ll be wanting to get engaged to Helen before he does anything else ; and how can my sister let the girl go to sleep on the grass in that fashion ! I thought she had more sense than that, anyhow ; but Helen is terribly spoilt.”

Knitting her brows impatiently she read on till she came to “ sweet Mary Myles ! ” With anger and consternation she sprang from her chair and laid her hand on the bell, her first impulse being to send a telegram requiring Herbert’s immediate return ; but Mrs. Langridge was not in her nature either impulsive or rash.

“ Mary Myles ! ” she said, contemptuously, and paused.

Such anger as now coursed through her veins she had never felt before. Her life had been prosperous and smooth. She had ruled with unquestioned sway the whole household

before she married. In her short married life she had been the most benevolent of despots, and her darling Herbert, the sole reminder of that brief and golden epoch, had never revolted from her authority either in childhood or boyhood, nor had recognized any other law but her supreme will, confident as he became older that she had only one object in life—his happiness, his success. He knew that his mother would give him all he desired, and his high aims and purity of purpose had always gone hand in hand with what she most hoped and wished for—for him. And in his eyes, every honour that he had won, every success that he had achieved, seemed to be for her, and through her; and thus he so identified each aspiration, each wish of his own with hers, that he never conceived that there could possibly come a time when there would be some point where their ideas would diverge. As yet he had had no temptation to speculate upon such a possibility occurring. His sphere hitherto, although intellectually broad, had been peculiarly narrow in all experience of worldly affairs even for his age. He only knew of one world—the world hemmed in by his school and college life.

Mrs. Langridge took her hand off the bell.

“No, no,” she said, the usual imperious manner returning to her, “this matter is soon settled; but what an idiot the dear boy is to suppose that I —”

A little scornful laugh cut short her remark.

“Sweet Mary Myles”! she said, hissing out each word separately from closed lips, and then drawing near her writing-table, unheeding her breakfast, she wrote to her sister thus —

“DEAR KATE,

“I enclose you a letter received from Herbert this morning. It reads to me as if written by a lunatic, but judge for yourself, and afterwards lose no time in sending that person alluded to out of your house. Say nothing to Herbert, as I shall be with you a few hours after you receive this communication.

“Your affectionate

“ELINOR.”

Mrs. Langridge immediately ordered that this short note, insolent alike in its character and tone, should at once be taken to the post. She knew that it was insolent, and she knew that in another half hour her lady-

like instincts would have prevailed over her anger, and she would have committed it to the flames; but at this moment her anger against her sister was stronger than any other feeling.

And this was the letter, which brought to Mrs. Hazelhurst in her dressing-room the next morning, caused her almost unexampled absence from the breakfast table. It brought her an inexpressible sense of disappointment and grief. Had it come some two or three days since it would have overwhelmed her with surprise and mortification; but she had been prepared, in some slight measure, for the blow. She had not thought, however, that it had gone so far; she deemed that her perceptions were acute, and that she had herself seen the very first lapse into what was, at the most, an incipient flirtation. She burst into tears as her cherished designs thus seemed in danger of overthrow; but a feeling of anger dried her tears almost as soon as they were shed. In our greatest sorrows there often comes an unexpected solace from the most trifling incidents, and perhaps there is no greater consoler for the moment than a suddenly-aroused indigna-

tion. And Mrs. Hazelhurst's indignation was deeply aroused by the tone of her sister's letter. She had been accustomed throughout her whole life to succumb to Mrs. Langridge, but the high pressure so continuously maintained had of late somewhat raised the temperature of Mrs. Hazelhurst's forbearing nature to a certain level bordering upon resistance. As for her nephew, there was everything in him that promised well; but he had all to gain, and was it fair or reasonable that Mrs. Langridge should always treat the hoped-for marriage as if her dear Helen and she herself would be the only gainers? Helen with her good looks and her fortune — Helen, who might command a man who had not his spurs to win! It was often more than she could bear, and displeased as she was with the conduct of Herbert and Miss Myles, Mrs. Langridge this morning came in for fully an equal share of censure.

“Send that person out of the house.”

What possible right had her sister to dictate to her in that arrogant style, and of whom was she speaking? Of her scullery maid? If it had been that individual, would she even then have any right to assume so authoritative a tone, or to order the dismissal

of the very lowest menial in a house not her own? "This is the result of my always having yielded to her. It is ever the case with people like her—the more you give in to them, the more intolerable they become. 'That person!'" It was, therefore, owing to Mrs. Langridge having absorbed the stronger rays, that a very small flickering of anger was left to be expended on the chief offender.

"Will you tell Miss Myles that I shall be very glad to see her if she will kindly come here to my room after breakfast?"

Such was the courteously modified request conveyed to Miss Myles, which received a very early response, in person.

"My mother has had a letter from aunt this morning, Herbert. I believe she is coming to-day herself. I hope she is not intending to carry you off."

"What time will she be here?" cried Herbert, eagerly.

"I think it will not be before the afternoon, but my mother seems to have a great deal to think of this morning, and was not disposed to be communicative. That is why she is keeping her room."

"Then we will have our ride this morning,

Helen, and we will call and take luncheon at the Vicarage, as we promised to do, after which we will both canter off to the station, and have the first look at my dear mother. Will that suit you, cousin? How glad I am to be sure!"

Helen knew nothing of the mental reserve which covered the real source of gladness, she merely thought it one of the many evidences of his filial love that made his face brighten up with joy.

"I wonder that my mother did not write to me too," he said, as they galloped off together.

And Mrs. Hazelhurst actually rose as Mary entered—rose and advanced to meet her, and retained the proffered hand, whilst her own trembled violently.

"You are not well, dear Mrs. Hazelhurst," said the latter, tenderly, and with manifest anxiety.

"I am not well, Miss Myles, but be seated," as she again sank back into her chair and pointed to a seat placed near her own; "I am pained, very much pained, at some most unexpected, unwelcome news." Tears were again rising, and as Mrs. Hazelhurst felt that

she should completely break down in any attempt to introduce the matter gently, she laid Mrs. Langridge's letter and enclosure in Miss Myles's hand.

“There, take this letter and read for yourself, and then you will see why I am so deeply, deeply pained. Read.”

Mrs. Hazelhurst folded her hands on her lap and leant back wearily. Mary hastily looked at Herbert's letter, and gave a slighter glance at the note of Mrs. Langridge, but she saw enough, and a proud look of resistance in her face was the result. She slowly and carefully refolded them, and laid them on Mrs. Hazelhurst's lap.

“Those letters were not intended for my sight, Mrs. Hazelhurst,” was her sole remark.

“I could not trust myself to speak to you, Miss Myles. It is true then! I am pained beyond all measure.”

“My engagement to Mr. Herbert Langridge is true beyond all doubt, Mrs. Hazelhurst, if you refer to that.”

“Miss Myles!” cried Mrs. Hazelhurst, warmly, “it cannot be sustained—it cannot be sustained—you must know that it cannot be sustained; you see what my sister writes.”

“What Mrs. Langridge has written was

not addressed to myself. I am very sorry that upon my account such a tone has been employed towards you. That gives me pain, Mrs. Hazelhurst, and I feel for you deeply."

Mrs. Hazelhurst might well feel that she was not equal to the task of catechising her governess for the sin of entangling her nephew, as her sister considered it.

"Mrs. Langridge is coming to-day, as you perceive. Will you speak to her yourself? I am in no condition to argue with her, as is evident. Will you see her yourself?"

Mary was silent for some time.

"I do not consider, Mrs. Hazelhurst, that I am in any way called upon to see Mrs. Langridge; it is with her son only that it is befitting for her to confer. I do not say this in consequence of that sentence in her note upon which my eyes unfortunately fell; I put that aside as if I had not seen it. The insult, if insult were intended, is not to me, and is unheeded by me; but I do not know Mrs. Langridge, and I do not recognize her right to arraign me at the bar of her maternal jurisdiction."

"But, my dear Miss Myles, you must confess that both she and I have cause for great dissatisfaction at what has occurred."

“If I had thought so it would never have occurred.”

“Well, I cannot enter into it with you ; it is too painful. I cannot understand how you can be so calm about it. I dread to meet my sister, Mrs. Langridge, in her present mood.”

“If it will spare you, I will take upon myself the whole weight of Mrs. Langridge’s wrath. She will, doubtless, soon be mollified. There are some people who put down the most offensive things on paper, but who are quite harmless individuals nevertheless.”

Mrs. Hazelhurst in her inmost self felt rather gratified than otherwise at the tone of scornful indifference which Miss Myles assumed in respect to Mrs. Langridge. So, as she rose, it was with no ungentle look that she regarded her, but rather with one of great surprise.

“I can hardly understand you ; you do not seem to realize —”

She hesitated.

Mary Myles took Mrs. Hazelhurst’s hand in both hers and raised it to her lips.

“I only realize one fact just now, and that is that Herbert Langridge loves me. That happy truth covers all my present horizon.

Perfect love casteth out fear ; there is no room in my heart for misgivings.” And she looked into Mrs. Hazelhurst’s face with luminous, unclouded eyes.

“ I do not wonder that you are unwell, Kate,” said Mrs. Langridge, after the first greetings had been exchanged ; “ but you must feel grateful for my advice to send her away directly. I am convinced that it was the best thing to do, although I had some doubts about you because of your mistaken judgment respecting the person in question. In my opinion, it only aggravates the case. It is a most shameless piece of ingratitude after the very exceptional courtesy and consideration you have always shown her.”

“ Miss Myles has not gone ; she does not leave here until she enters upon her new appointment,” was the answer. Mrs. Hazelhurst had been fortified somewhat by her interview with her governess, and she added, “ It would have been a monstrous and unheard-of thing had I done as you suggested ; but I never dreamt of so doing.”

“ Surely, Kate, you have not passed it over in silence ? ”

“ Certainly not. I have had some conversation with Miss Myles.”

“ Well ?”

“ Miss Myles is willing to see you herself.”

“ See me herself ! For what purpose ? She must be a bold, unprincipled woman !”

“ She is nothing of the kind, Elinor ; nor did she desire any interview with yourself except for my sake, to spare me the unavoidable excitement of arranging this affair with Herbert and you.”

“ Is Herbert at home ? Does he contemplate coming in with her hand in hand, and asking my blessing, poor dear fellow !”

“ Herbert is not within, Elinor ; he is out with Helen, and Miss Myles is at home and disengaged. If you wish not to see her, say so, and I will send Bowles to inform her to that effect, and in that case she will probably walk over to the Vicarage for dinner ; there, a warm welcome always awaits her. I think you will hardly like to meet her at dinner without first knowing in what relations you stand to each other.”

“ There is no difficulty about that, I should think, and governesses are not generally supposed to be essential requisites at the dinner table. I will see her, however, as you have

so arranged it, and put things on a proper footing before Herbert returns."

"It will be far better, Elinor; and if you will kindly go into the library I will acquaint Miss Myles that you are there, and expecting her."

"I suppose, being from Girton, that she is not given to hysterics?" said Mrs. Langridge, scornfully.

"She is not given to hysterics, Elinor. Except in this most imprudent and unhappy business, I have always had every reason to estimate her as a —"

"Very superior person; a remark that I have often heard you make regarding her, the fallacy of which opinion is now evident."

Mrs. Hazelhurst bit her lip.

Mrs. Langridge had raised her eye-glass as Miss Myles entered the room, but she dropped it hastily at the first glance, which took in the whole personality of the governess, with a gesture which unconsciously expressed regret at having subjected the object of it to such an investigation. She looked down for a moment at an open letter lying upon the table before her as if to recover from that, her equanimity which had experienced a little

shock. Miss Myles, the governess, was not exactly what she had been picturing to herself.

“Miss Myles, I believe. Pray be seated,” and she graciously waved her hand to a chair.

“Thank you, but I prefer to stand, Mrs. Langridge,” answered Mary, coldly.

“It is rather an unpleasant duty which I have to perform, Miss Myles, and which, if it had been possible, I would have avoided.”

And Miss Myles, her sister’s governess, was standing erect before her, with calm, clear eyes, looking full into her face, and did not seem to be one whit ashamed.

“I have reason to believe, Miss Myles, from a most extraordinary letter that I received from my son yesterday morning, that he has made you an offer of marriage.”

“He has done so, Mrs. Langridge.”

“And the same letter leads me to suppose,” continued Mrs. Langridge, in dry, incisive tones, taking the letter from the table before her, and applying her eye-glass to the passage, as if for the purpose of verifying the remark, “that—that—you have—accepted him?”

Mrs. Langridge let the letter fall back on

to the table, and relinquishing her eye-glass, looked at her severely.

“ I have,” said Mary, without lowering her eyes.

“ Did you think yourself justified in so doing ? ” said Mrs. Langridge, with some asperity.

“ Perfectly so.”

And Mary, though her voice was sweet and low, and in strong contrast to that of Mrs. Langridge, drew back her head as she uttered those words.

“ May I ask your reasons for thinking so ? ” continued Mrs. Langridge, in a sarcastic tone.

“ Because I love him.”

“ Really, you are very frank,” cried Mrs. Langridge, contemptuously, looking at her this time through her eye-glass. “ I infer from this, that my poor boy told you that he loved you, and that you believed him. A person doubtless of some experience in such matters ought nevertheless to have known what worth attaches to a boy’s love-making.”

Mary regarded Mrs. Langridge in silence, but the fire was being kindled.

Mrs. Langridge, thinking she had made a successful thrust, was encouraged to pursue

her supposed advantage, and continued with a still further measure of scorn —

“ I don’t pretend to be able to analyze the feelings which you avow with such unnecessary frankness—to give it the mildest term it is capable of—but whatever your belief or your convictions may be as regards my son, you will please to consider them as null from this moment. My son is a minor, a mere schoolboy, and quite inexperienced. He has yielded to the fascinations of a lady many years older than himself, possibly an expert in such little affairs, one who well knows that very young men, boys, rather, are easily entangled when beauty weaves the meshes.”

Mrs. Langridge having looked up for a moment had almost involuntarily been betrayed into those last words. Beneath the look that she encountered she paused, thinking this tribute to the charms of the woman before her would remove the sting from her words. As, however, they evoked no answer, she continued with an impatient toss of the head —

“ Anyhow, my son returns with me to-morrow. The sooner this ridiculous affair is brought to a close the better for all concerned. As a preliminary, I demand per-

emptorily, as his mother and his guardian, the restoration of all gifts and love letters, if my poor boy has been so absurd as to write any," and Mrs. Langridge gave a little laugh.

Mary's face was aflame, and at last she spake with her tongue.

"Gifts ! love letters ! You know not what manner of woman I am, Mrs. Langridge, or you would have hesitated before speaking thus. Had I 'gifts or love letters' do you think I would surrender them at such bidding ? Do you dare to insinuate that, because I am nearly six years older than Herbert Langridge, that it is I who have sought to inveigle him ; that it is I who have wooed and won him—I who have tried to entangle—to entangle him ? You insult your son whilst you are insulting me. Herbert Langridge has given me the first love of a true and fervent heart, and he has mine. Yes, I am his, and he is mine. We are pledged to marry, and we have sealed it with a kiss, and as sure as God reigns in heaven I will not renounce him at the bidding of anyone until he shows himself unworthy of my love."

Mrs. Langridge had not expected this out-

burst. From the moment of Mary's entrance she had steeled herself, as it were, against the prepossessing figure before her, by rivetting her eyes upon her son's disturbing letter, where the obnoxious words, "sweet Mary Myles," stood in bold revolt before her; but under this apparent defiance of the governess she pushed the letter aside, and regarded her steadily, and for a few moments there was silence.

Mrs. Langridge had the feelings of an artist. As her eyes dwelt upon the woman standing there, she took in at a glance what a noble picture she made. After the unwonted display of passionate feeling in her last utterances, Mary had turned her head towards the partially open window, as if she sought the calming influence of Nature. The poise of the head, the long lines of dark blue drapery that fell in soft folds round her faultless figure, only confined at the waist by an antique silver clasp of choice design, the classical arrangement of the rich hair, whose warm brown tints were heightened by the fireglow of a July sunset, the deep golden rays of which bathed also cheek and brow in that tone of colour which all the works of the old Italian painters exhibit, leading one to

the conclusion that it was chiefly under the light of a setting sun that their glowing effects were obtained, absorbed her.

Mrs. Langridge's thoughts were abstracted for a few moments from the purpose of the interview, as her gaze was rivetted upon the whole outline of the form before her. She had surely seen some resemblance to it in—was it not one of Giorgione's pictures? Whilst she strove to recall it, Mary turned her head, and the spell was broken. Against her will Mrs. Langridge's artistic instincts had paid a tribute of admiration. She suddenly felt a new access of irritation from that unwilling admission of another self within her, and with still greater asperity and haughtiness she remarked—

“I did not come here to listen to mock heroics from a lady professor, nor do I choose to have a scene with my sister's governess.”

“Did you then expect, Mrs. Langridge, that I should throw myself on your mercy, and make my confession—I have sinned—I have sinned exceedingly—through my fault—through my fault—through my most grievous fault.”

How aggravating was the quiet intonation

—how more than aggravating the smile that accompanied those words ! Did that governess laugh her to scorn and defy her ?

Anger was surging at the heart of the elder woman, anger in which hatred was mingled. Here was not one whom she could bring into subjection by contempt wherewith the weak can be overthrown. Admiration can find no entrance where we despise, but it is possible to hate what we admire. Mary, however, regretting that any show of emotion had been forced from her, was inwardly resolving that feeling, however outraged, should not have entire sway. Mrs. Langridge meanwhile almost cursed the woman before her for all those physical and mental gifts which were a vindication of her son's infatuation, as she termed it. She looked down. "This governess is not to be coerced," she felt rather than said.

"You did not allow me to finish my sentence, Miss Myles. I came here as a mother who was anxious only for the welfare of her son. Surely you will admit that a mother has some claim to attention in such a matter."

Mary started.

"Mother is a sacred name for me. Speak

to me as a mother only, and I will listen reverently."

" Then as the mother and sole guardian of Herbert Langridge, I must tell you that what his career in life is to be, depends upon me, and upon me alone. He has no means of his own; none but what he derives from me. All hopes of his success are irretrievably lost if you do not release him, and the boy whom you seem so resolutely determined to hold to his vows will be a beggar."

" Am I to understand, Mrs. Langridge, that you could contemplate cutting off this career by withholding the means so entirely at your disposal ? "

" Most decidedly."

" No man need be a beggar who marries me," said Mary, gently, " even were he not Herbert Langridge; but for him the possibility of poverty is a bugbear."

Mrs. Langridge raised her eye-glass. So bold a statement, so fearlessly put, required some explanation, and she evidently expected one, but none came.

" You will excuse me for observing, Miss Myles, that your position here warrants me in supposing that you have no other funds at your disposal than those derived from an

arduous and not usually remunerative employment ; and for my son, if you have deceived yourself into a conviction that as his wife you would not be necessitated to earn your own livelihood, it was a miserable delusion. I am at a loss, therefore, to understand your assertion, after what I have told you, that your marriage with my son would not be absolute beggary.”

“ We have both health, and I suppose, notwithstanding my six years’ seniority, I may venture to say, youth. We are both able in body and mind. There is no work which I, at least, despise. We are one in all our thoughts and aspirations, and the world is before us. I repeat, that hand linked with hand, and heart joined to heart, we can both afford, with God’s grace, to laugh at the word beggary.”

Mrs. Langridge leant back in her chair.

“ Miss Myles, I thank you for the lucid exposition of your views. You have been pleased to give me a short compendium of what you deem your own and my son’s qualifications for matrimony ; and evidently you have no hesitating opinion as regards your own. The only sensible deduction, however, which I am able to draw therefrom

is that you actually contemplate—yes, actually and gravely contemplate converting my poor boy into a schoolmaster! A very respectable occupation, doubtless, and one in which you could prove to him a very useful assistant; but such a position, Miss Myles, with all due deference to your judgment, is not for my son."

A slight smile flickered for a moment over Mary's face.

"I find myself, Mrs. Langridge, in what would be an unwonted position for any woman, but for me, with all my past modes of thought and habits of life, it is so much at variance, that I must needs smile, though in no light or laughing mood. What! am I pleading for my fitness to be his wife to the mother of the man who loves me? No! it is too much; I rather prefer to hear you plead as a mother, with what you deem the mother's privilege to veto her son's right to choose his own wife."

"Thank you, Miss Myles, so far. I entirely waive the consideration of your personal fitness, and, as you have suggested, I will stand solely upon my right as a mother—as a mother who has sacrificed herself for twenty years for her son, and who now demands

from him in return, filial gratitude and obedience. Left a widow when I was but a girl of twenty-one—mind you, a girl of twenty-one—to whom her husband, untimely stricken down, left all his property unreservedly and unhampered by trustees. Sole guardian of his infant son—almost the last exhortation, the last wish uttered by his dying lips was, that I should marry again, and so redeem him from the wrong of having unwittingly been the cause of blighting my girlhood when he made me his wife.

“‘ I promised you wealth and position, poor girl,’ were among those solemn words, ‘ and I leave you a widow with a babe to bring up ; but I die happy because I have brought myself to consider your future marriage not only with composure, but with joy, as a necessary and most desirable event. I trust to your own good sense and judgment not to imperil my boy’s future by a rash choice ; but I impose upon you no conditions. My entire property—not a large one, as you know—is unreservedly yours. May God bless you, and may the man you marry, respect my memory for the trust I place in him, and be a father to my boy.’

“To you I have spoken of matters of which even my son is ignorant. I would not oppress his youth with an overburthening sense of obligation ; he knows nothing of how the property is left. I was young, I was handsome ; I had a competent income, and only one child, and that a boy. Believe me, I did not wait for suitors, and—I now confess it—my heart did not remain untouched. But what did I do ? What ? Why, I crushed down love, hopes, all. I would not risk giving the child of the generous husband of my youth, a step-father. What it cost me only God and myself knew ; no, not even my sister ever guessed the price at which I earned my son’s gratitude. I devoted myself wholly to that boy—wholly—and this was my consolation—he should go to the Bar, he should be a leader of men, he should make a name, and his dead father’s should live again in him ; and when time had brought the fulfilment of my hopes I could contemplate still further abnegating myself, and would have been content to resign the first place in his affections to the wife whom he should choose, but that wife —”

“Must not be Miss Myles, the governess.”

“ You have interrupted me, Miss Myles; but you are right—it must not—it cannot be Miss Myles, the governess.”

“ As a mother, could you be happy in imperilling the happiness of your son ?”

“ Believe me, Miss Myles, that at his age such wounds are easily healed.”

“ It is character, not age, that determines the depth of feeling.”

“ My son is not a fool, Miss Myles. Men who spoil their whole lives for a first love may be capable of intense emotion, but they are but poor weak creatures when all is said and done. My son is not one of such. He will suffer awhile as I suffered, but he will conquer as I conquered, and now, Miss Myles, judge yourself whether you or I have the best right to the possession of Herbert Langridge ?”

There was silence. Mary’s hand, which had lain lightly on the back of the nearest chair, grasped it convulsively. It was but momentary. Clearly, without faltering, came the words at last —

“ The first right, Mrs. Langridge, if you stand upon your right, is uncontestedly with you.”

She bowed her head low, and turned away.

As her hand touched the handle of the door Mrs. Langridge said, in softened tones —

“ Miss Myles,” but Mary stayed not, and the door closed behind her.

“ My dear Kate, my dear Kate, what could you be thinking of when you engaged that woman for your daughter? If you had no discriminating judgment, where were your eyes ? ”

Mrs. Hazelhurst, who had been in a most nervous state of suspense during the interview, had hastened to her sister so soon as Miss Myles left the library.

“ Elinor,” she answered, gravely, “ I can well understand and sympathize with your annoyance, but not with the tone you take in this unfortunate affair. Miss Myles, in every respect—well, I’ve always considered her a most unexceptionable character.”

“ Where were your eyes ? ” repeated Mrs. Langridge.

“ What do you mean, Elinor ? ”

“ Why, you do not mean to say that you don’t know that your Miss Myles is one of the most beautiful of women, and therefore upon that account alone is a most unfit person to enter into any family as a governess.”

“Really, Elinor, it never struck me until quite lately that she was anything out of the common. I thought her nice-looking, that was all, and I choose to have nice-looking people around me. She always seemed to me to have no style, to be rather prim ; in fact, as I have often said, quite the governess.”

“If ever she did appear in that light it was put on, and as for style, she has plenty and to spare—not the style of the fashion-books, certainly, but she is a dangerous woman !”

“My dear Elinor !—”

“And not over discreet in her choice of words,” continued Mrs. Langridge, with asperity ; “‘bugbear’ was not a word in use among refined gentlewomen when we were girls. I hope Helen does not indulge in the word ‘bugbear,’ and I hope Helen has not been initiated into Ouidaism by this Girton governess of yours, for her frank outspoken talk above love and kisses was decidedly Ouidaish.”

“My daughter Helen,” said Mrs. Hazelhurst, with an assumption of dignity, “is in herself a vindication of Miss Myles.”

“Have not my son and Helen yet returned ?”

“ I think that at this moment they are entering the gate; but has there been no result to your long interview? How did Miss Myles bear your reproaches? ”

“ In the best possible way, for she will release Herbert from his engagement.”

“ She is a good woman, say what you like, Elinor.”

“ She must have loved her own mother very much,” said Mrs. Langridge, half in soliloquy.

The door was flung impetuously open.

“ My dear mother! my dear dear mother! ” and her son rushed to her and clasped her in his strong arms, kissing her on brow and cheek with passionate eagerness. “ How kind this is! ” He pushed her gently from him, and held her off by each shoulder that he might look into her face. “ Have you seen Mary? ” he asked, in tones that seemed to come from innermost heart depths. “ Have you been introduced to Miss Myles? Have you seen my Mary? ”

“ I have not seen your Mary, but I have seen Miss Myles.”

“ Well! and what is your verdict upon Miss Myles? ” he said, laughing gaily.

“ That she is not a fit person to be your wife.”

“Mother!” He released her shoulders from his firm but loving grip, and recoiled two or three paces.

“You foolish boy! but there are some excuses to be made for you, only your flirtation went a little too far. But it is over, and let all remembrance of it be buried at once.”

“My dearest mother!” said Herbert, in a less exalted tone, “I thought I put it very clearly. I should not have insulted you by telling you of a flirtation if I were light-minded enough to indulge in one; but—but—I told you—Miss Myles is my future wife. I wrote to you that you might lose no time in knowing her, in loving her as your daughter.”

The mother and son looked at each other; both seemed to find in that onlook something they had not seen before.

“On this matter I will have no arguments with my son. I will never give my consent to any such marriage either now or at any future time. I have a mother’s right to do so, and I will enforce it.”

“Mother, I grieve to say it to you, but when you are unjust and unloving, as now,

you have not right with you, and I refuse to acknowledge a motherhood so repellent."

Her Herbert defiant! Was it not an instinctive dread when she shrank from the influence of such a woman over her only child?

"Your Miss Myles has shown a truer appreciation of a mother's right, and has released you from all that was wrung from your weakness."

The breath of the young man came short and quick. He caught his mother by the arm, and said hoarsely —

"What do you mean, mother? Mary is as true as gold; Mary has promised to be my wife."

"Miss Myles shall tell you with her own lips that you are free; for myself, I tell you that never whilst I live will I see that woman your wife."

"Put not the grave between us, mother."

"Better the grave than that!"

"A note for Mr. Langridge."

Herbert took it from the salver handed to him, and when the servant closed the door on leaving the room, he tore it open.

“Meet me at the chestnuts ; I await you there.”

Herbert rose.

“Miss Myles seeks a meeting, mother.”

“Go, and she will tell you your duty.”

“Mother, you must needs pay some tribute to her worth ; I thank you.”

CHAPTER XIII.

I could not love thee, dear, so much
Loved I not honour more.

LOVELACE.

AND Mary stood waiting for her lover by the tall chestnut tree, under whose spreading branches she had laid herself down that July morning some two or three weeks ago, heart free, and rejoicing in the wayward liberty of the hour—not as now with the shadows drawing round it, but as it was then. She saw it all again under sunlit noon, even to the bright-winged moth who had soothed her into slumber by the contemplation of its beauty. She leant against the trunk; she was paler than usual, and weary in spirit. All through the day there had been constant demands for an outward composure, a continual strain upon her nerves in her en-

deavours to hide away the strong tumultuous passion throbbing at her very heart's core.

Now, as she awaited this greater trial, she could not but confess to herself that she had failed in her encounter with Mrs. Langridge. She had gone without flinching to confront the angry mother, proud in her own boasted serenity of spirit, thinking that she bore about her an ægis that should ward off all the shafts of scorn. She thought that she had long since possessed her soul in patience, but she had broken down, and given way before some random-aimed taunts, and had been betrayed into a petulance which she despised. In the late strife of tongues she had held her own, but at what cost? Had not her sense of dignity been outraged? Are these the first fruits of love? she thought bitterly, that love for whose coming she had waited until the early spring time of life was almost on its wane. How nearly had she forgotten that all real love is divine, and flees before the touch of selfishness. Was it not with almost religious awe that she had welcomed its approach into her heart, and now must it be ruthlessly crushed out, or held fast in very despite of the disappointment and anguish its retention would bring

to another? And who was that other? The mother of him she loved. But she had made up her mind. In a few minutes she would tell the man whom she loved so much, and for whom she would be content to walk barefoot over the flints with those delicate feet of hers through life's most rugged paths, if she might only have him ever by her side, and feel the strength of his encircling arm, and hear the deep tones of his loving voice encouraging her on, towards some distant goal and haven of rest; she it was who was to tell him the cold truth, that they must at once bid each other farewell, and part perhaps for ever.

Had it all been foolishness—one of folly's frequent dreams, which, clothed in radiance in the unreasoning hours of the night, fade into dull grey before the light of the morning? And would they who deem that the emotions are always misguiding be wrong if they called it foolishness on her part? Had all the delight that she had felt from the possession of that young man's affections counterbalanced the anguish and the mortification of the last few hours?

Those stinging, contemptuous words had pierced her to the very soul. The wounds

that they had made were rankling within her. She had no fears about her ultimate victory over herself; to-morrow night she would have left Sunnyside, and the quiet life of discipline and duty would again recommence, but between this time and to-morrow, what hours of agony were still before her! Duty! duty! had been the watchword of her young life, but nevertheless had she not ever looked forward to something that she esteemed better than the appointed task, the daily round? Had she not confidently expected a revelation of a diviner life? "I will go whithersoever it takes me," she had said in her more exalted moods, "whether it be to the hearth and home, or to serve at the altar of God, or to work for suffering humanity." "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth," had been the daily attitude of this true-souled, warm-hearted, but apparently cold, woman.

She had listened unmoved to the friendly expostulations of some few who thought that they at least really knew her, and who chid her because of her self-willed isolation from a society that she was so fitted to adorn. "She was burying herself," they would urge, "she, who had only to appear in those

circles where so many inferior lights were worshipped as stars of the first magnitude, because she had not been seen.” And Mary had answered with a quiet smile, “What could the great world give her to satisfy the longings of her soul?” There was one bright spot in the past, the joy of an unclouded childhood; but happiness like to that would never return. Standing there awaiting her lover whilst the ruddy brown dimness of the evening was gathering round her, she recalled the memories of that idolized mother who alone, until now, had touched her heart with the fire of love, and for whom she had felt such singular and unparalleled devotion that the very thought of her, though dead, had compelled the present abnegation.

What pictures of the past rose suddenly before her, conjured up by that remembrance, although her eyes looked only on the tall bracken, golden-crisped by many a hot July sun! That day, which had set its seal upon her future, was present once again, that day, when she had laid her head upon her mother’s shoulder, and had said—

“Are you vexed, dear little mother? You look sad; but if I were to say ‘Yes’ when I ought to say ‘No,’ would you not be still

more unhappy? Why, then, so grave to-day?"

"Because, my darling, he was your father's friend, a good man and a true, because I know that could you have consented to have become his wife, although he is more than twice your age, he would be a loving and tender protector to my good, my beautiful, but penniless child, when I am no more."

"Not penniless, dear, anxious mother. Have I not a large dowry of three hundred golden sovereigns? Let me have my way and put them out to usury. Let me go to Girton, and whatever is to be gained there by hard work I will gain, and then your heart can be set at rest, for I have been told that a Girton girl with honours need not be a poor governess. Now why do you shake your head?"

"There is one insurmountable obstacle to that, my Amy."

"What? Am I too stupid?"

"You are far too lovely."

"Far too lovely!" and the girl laughed outright. "Why, then, I must look prim, and wear very stiff collars, drag my hair into the tiniest of close little knots, and, if that will not suffice, wear spectacles. If it is necessary

to be a fright to gain honours, why, a fright I will be ; but I will gain them, and then we can live on just as happily as before, with no doubts to cloud the horizon.”

“ Do not talk in that way, child ; I have sunned myself in your growing beauties like the most foolish of mothers, watching their expansion with delight as one watches the opening buds of a choice flower—but not to cast it away afterwards.”

“ What would the wise, discreet ones say if they heard you talk thus, mammie ? ”

“ They who do not know a weed from a flower would condemn me. Pampered weeds grow the rankest. Fair blossoms well cherished bring forth fruits worthy of their promise.”

“ You are like all the rest of them, darling little mother ; you want to marry your only daughter as heartily as if she were one of six ; nay, shake not your head again so deprecatingly. I know that you would have cried your eyes out if I had said ‘ Yes ’ to that very ancient lover, who, I suppose, would have carried me off and left you to pine alone. Oh, no, no,” and the girl laid her head on the mother’s shoulder ; “ we will live together when I come back from Girton,

as we do now, and I will make the cherry pies as before." Some recent memory here flooded her face with laughter. "Look, now, there is doubtless a schoolboy somewhere to whom will devolve the task of gathering some day the flower of your tending; so, as I am only sixteen, we will wait for each other, but if we are not destined to meet on this planet, and have each of us to wander through space, and never, never find each other at all—"

Her mother stopped her mouth with a kiss at that sally, saying—

"At least take care, my Amy, that you do not fall in love with the man in the moon."

"It seems to-night that I might as well have given my heart to the man in the moon," said Mary, faintly smiling; but the mere thought of her mother always brought a ray of sunshine into any cloud-lands through which she occasionally had to pass, and now on the darkening woodlands of Sunnyside she saw again the cottage home of her childhood with its roses and its cherry trees, its bees and the glad rustic life. Still further away, almost to babyhood, travelled the swift-winged memories; the mother leaning far back in her chair, stretching herself out

to make an inclined plane, and holding the chubby arms firmly in either hand, whilst each little foot lifted alternately unnecessarily high, cautiously trod the sloping ascent till reaching the mother's waist in safety, it was rapturously caught up and deluged with kisses from its pursed-up lips to its rosy little soles. This remembrance, only remembered possibly through a fond mother's frequent recital of early maternal joys, by a quick revulsion of feeling brought back the first beginnings of Herbert's love, and this thought, which had often lately caused her cheeks to tingle with blushes, recalled now again as she stood upon the very spot where they had first met, threatened to sap her stern resolution.

“I wish it were over,” she said, drearily, “and that I were away. To say hard things to him is terrible; but it must be—it must be—I must this night with my own hands loose him and tell him he is free. But what then —”

The outline of a tall figure shadowing the horizon told her that he was coming.

“How cruel he will think me,” she thought, as she drew herself up and compressed herself, as it were, into an attitude of cold

rigidity, with firm tightened lips though with strongly throbbing heart; but at the loud cry of mingled agony and joy that pierced her ears as her lover first perceived her presence, all watch and ward fell away, and as he rushed towards her, as her name "Mary, Mary" burst in impassioned accents from his lips, the woman threw herself into his arms and buried her face in his breast.

Tumultuous gladness coursed through the young man's veins. She was his, she had given herself unreservedly to him, she let him kiss her brow, her cheek, her lips; her own lips returned the pressure of his.

"My Amy! my Amy! my glorious one! my own!" he cried in rapture, still holding her to his breast.

What name had he called her by? The pet name used so often by her mother, and from him! She started, it was like a voice from the other world.

"You are weeping," he said, in a low-hushed tone. "There is no need for weeping now; even now I make you my own, never more to part. Come with me, Mary; come this moment—now—"

"Now, even now, we must part, therefore have I come," answered Mary, slowly,

raising her drooped head and drawing herself away.

“No one shall part us,” cried the young man fiercely.

“No one but ourselves. I, even I myself say to you that we must part. Listen to me, Herbert,” she cried, staying with uplifted hand the passionate words which were about to rush from his lips. “Listen, not so much to me as to your own better self. Have you not already told me that you knew not which feeling of yours towards me was the greater: reverence or love? Did you not say so in the garden? What reverence would be left in your heart if I, the slave of passion, should place my hand now in yours and say ‘Yes, let us flee?’ Love would remain, will you say? Love without reverence is a base thing which would burn swiftly out and leave us but its ashes.”

Her pleading tones prevailed upon him to hearken to her whilst she told him how it was that he owed so great a debt to his mother. For the first time he heard of those long years of untiring devotion, of a love which had been crushed out, and he could not but recognize that that mother’s nature, so like his own, would have loved as strongly as

he, and yet she had conquered it for his sake.

“What she has done,” she continued, softly, “we can do; but it is not needful that our love shall be wrenched up by the very roots as hers was, and thrown aside to wither. It can live on through the storm, and will shine with a steadier and clearer light when the tempest is hushed and the whirlwind has passed by.”

Herbert answered not, but she felt rather than saw that his brows were knit and his lips compressed.

“They who will ascend the heights must first cross the valley. Self renunciation is the high road to bliss.”

“You talk like a woman,” he answered, impatiently. “With women it may be easy, with men it is far otherwise.”

“With some men rather, not with strong, good, brave men such as you can grow into; and grow into all the sooner for this chastening. If I had not seen what was in you should I have loved you? If I had not seen that you would choose duty before inclination could I have loved you? A woman has joy in loving and in being loved; but a woman loves not him whom she despises, and a man

who can sacrifice his duty to God or to his country for love, wins no woman's heart that is worth the winning. I took note of you, little thinking whither it would lead me, and I saw in you one who in troublous times could be not so much a leader of men as your mother asks you to become, as one who would die, if need be, for honour's sake, one who would choose the higher life first, come what may, one who would wait for the consummation of Israel."

"Do not fling Bible texts at my head, Mary; it is no befitting time."

"If I dare not link the holiest truths with my love it is not for me, it is but a base thing, and I have staked my life on an illusion."

"Since you will have it so, Mary, I too can make Scripture serve my turn. Do you contemplate waiting like Anna in the temple, whilst I, like the aged Simeon, shall be content to depart in peace, when, after long years of separation, we have met again as greyheads, and looked upon each other's wrinkled brows? Are you a visionary, a dweller in the clouds, that you speak in this fashion to the man who loves you, as if love was a thing of unrealities, and to be satisfied with unmeaning words?"

“A dreamer of dreams if you will; but they are good dreams, such as follow upon a day’s work well done.”

“What are your dreams—that we shall be united one day in Paradise? Is that the consummation I am to work for?”

“Here is a path of duty clearly drawn out. Follow it in trust—whither it may lead neither you nor I can tell. Take up your crutch, your feet will not stumble on the road—rugged though it be—for a lamp will light you through all the way. There is no place here, Herbert, for the admission of divine discontent; here it must be uniformity with the will of God.”

She laid a hand on each of his shoulders and looked steadily at him.

“Forgive me,” she continued, in a low voice, “forgive me for speaking to you thus; but I am older than you—ever so much older—six long years with all their springs and summers, autumns and winters. When we meet again you will be older than I in all the richer wisdom that comes from a man’s more varied experiences, in all the wider, the greater knowledge of a stronger, larger nature. You will lead then, and I shall follow, shall follow, dear, in silence!”

“ Do you know what the term is which my mother has put between us ? Do you know that it is her death ? Can we pray for that ? Oh, my mother ! my poor mother ! ”

Mary shuddered.

“ It was not well said, but she will revoke that. She is ambitious ; pay the debt which you owe her, Herbert ; gratify her pride. Let her heart swell with joy at your achievements in the path which she has mapped out for you, and then go and seek her, and say to her ‘ Mother, I have done all that you wished me to do, it is yours,’ and the morning of that day will bring light into her soul, and gladness into our hearts.”

“ But what of the night ! what of the night ! ”

“ The night has its countless stars, Herbert.”

“ Forbidden to write as though I were still an unfledged school boy ! ” he muttered. “ Little did I think my mother could be so harsh a tyrant.”

“ Even tyrants should be obeyed until the hour comes when their yoke can be thrown off without sin. Would any special blessing come to us, if, braving her resentment, we should write ? Some dross ever clings to

language; if the spoken word can hardly show of what spirit we are—how much less the written. Let the submission be total. Herbert, we will not write to each other.”

“ The spring days of my life are gone, they have died out, and all before me is wrapt in gloom. Have you such trust in yourself and in me as so blank an outlook demands, Mary ?”

“ I have.”

“ You are a brave woman ! God help me in this my need. Give me your hand and let us go whilst yet I feel within me a small fraction of your strength.”

And hand in hand they walked homewards and spoke not by the way. At the door of the house in the twilight stood two figures.

“ See, Herbert, where your mother stands ! Had passion triumphed, and had we fled to an unblessed marriage, what agonies would have rent that mother’s soul this night.”

He did not answer; but a strong hand pressed hers in grateful acquiescence.

What wild, almost frenzied eyes were those that strained forward and met theirs. The hands of Mrs. Hazelhurst seemed to be clutching her sister as if to hold her back.

“Befooled ! befooled ! They are gone together by the night up-train, and to-morrow will be man and wife. Curse that woman and her lying eyes which have lost me my son.”

“Hush ! hush ! for mercy’s sake hush ! See where they come,” and Mrs. Hazelhurst, relaxing her hold, burst into tears. “I put back the dinner hour until eight o’clock, but it is now nine ; we got rather alarmed,” stammered poor Mrs. Hazelhurst.

Neither made any answer, but passed through the porch together.

“I give you back your son,” said Mary, in a low voice.

Mrs. Langridge laid her hand upon the girl’s arm.

“A mother’s thanks, Miss Myles.”

“Do not thank me, it is but a soulless body.” Those words spoken with slow distinctness, yet scarcely above a whisper, sent a momentary thrill to the mother’s heart.

Mary, without pausing, bowed and passed on. The mother turned away from her to speak to her son ; but his eyes were rivetted upon the retreating figure. At a bend of the staircase she stopped, and looking for a

moment back over the balustrade, she smiled upon her lover. A flash of light seemed struck from the young man's face by that impinging smile of hers, which was at once a farewell, yet bore in its depths an eternity of hope and love.

As the form of Mary Myles turned the angle, the light died out. It was a stern, grave man who offered his arm to Mrs. Langridge.

“Mother, shall I lead you in to dinner?” he said.

CHAPTER XIV.

Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous.

PROVERBS.

THERE could hardly be anything less like a social gathering than was exhibited in the little group of four near relatives assembled that evening at dinner at Mrs. Hazelhurst's.

“Not less than three,” is Horace's prescription as a necessary concomitant for a lively repast, and here there were four, and four people who were each and severally bound to each other by the ties of blood, and all of them intelligent, and ordinarily agreeable; two of them being in youth's first spring time, and abounding in animal spirits. Funeral feasts are dismal delusions, but they are not so oppressive as those solemn mockeries of the table, where people doomed to dine together with anger at their hearts,

sit through grace, and after grace, with no bettering of their condition therefrom; whilst the dreary silence all the time that the servants are present is only broken by the most commonplace civilities. One has to be cautious before servants; serious matters cannot be discussed before them; but servants know all that is thought to have been so well concealed from them, and it was quite evident to those who were waiting, and was afterwards discussed by them in the servants' hall, that "everybody at table was out of temper," for the being "out of temper" is the only solution at which servants can arrive, when any unusual gravity or suppressed display of grief produces a more reticent behaviour before them.

Now each of these four people really loved each other, but just at this particular epoch, every separate love was held in suspension from its lawful object. There was an all round sense of injury, and a swelling of the organs of combativeness, as decided as used to be seen by the frequenters of Donnybrook Fair, when anyone present by the slightest inopportune remark could have set all the shillelahs of indignation flying.

Mrs. Hazelhurst, as the hostess, smiled the usual conventional and stereotyped smile, and spoke the customary courteous words which propriety and etiquette demand even when the heart is very sore within. The others, not being constrained by so heavy a burthen as fell upon her as hostess, answered the questions put to them as succinctly as possible, and nothing more.

There was a cover laid for Miss Myles as usual, but few were in dread that she would make her appearance. In the opinion of Mrs. Langridge that was a farewell smile which was flung to her son over the balustrade, and full of meaning.

Mrs. Hazelhurst divided her discontent and displeasure equally between her sister and her nephew; that the latter should be so oblivious to her daughter's youthful beauty and to her fifty thousand pounds in her own right, as to fall in love with her governess instead, was as unpardonable as it was silly, in her maternal eyes; she almost felt irritability also towards Helen that such an occurrence was possible, although she was but sixteen and a school-girl. Helen was a little annoyed too, as school-girls of sixteen are apt to be sometimes, in that she had been

thus overlooked; and when Herbert had made her his confidant that afternoon during the ride, there was just a little pout unperceived by him at his glowing words when speaking of Miss Myles.

But within Mrs. Langridge's breast what upheavals of the fire pent up beneath were struggling to the surface, restrained only by the thinnest cosmical crust! She had got her son as a gift from Miss Myles! She had even thanked her in that moment of excitement unthinkingly; but that quietly triumphant smile, veiled in sweetness as its power was, had torn up all feelings of gratitude.

“A dangerous woman,” she had muttered, inaudibly, even while on Herbert’s arm, “but her triumph will be short.”

And Herbert? No one can analyze the conflict of his emotions. Who has not known that most difficult of positions when the heart is rent by two opposing loves? His mother hated the woman he had chosen for his wife. He loved his mother as his duty was, and she hated where he adored.

Little was eaten, little was said.

After the servants had retired Herbert was the first to speak.

“ My dear mother,” he said, respectfully ; but his voice fell upon Helen’s ear as the voice of someone else, and his face, as she looked at him, seemed to her eyes to have grown suddenly old. “ My dear mother, would it be too much to ask you to go by an early train to-morrow, as I have to be at Oxford in the evening ? ”

“ At Oxford ? ”

“ Yes, I have business to transact there,” he said curtly.

There was again silence.

“ I do not require you to leave so early if it be inconvenient or distasteful, mother, although I have to go myself. I trust, dear aunt, that you will not think me inconsiderate, but I must be in Oxford to-morrow.”

The “ must be in Oxford ” had never escaped before ; both his mother and aunt looked at him inquiringly.

“ The fact is,” he said, coldly, “ that I have gained my degree. The announcement came this morning, but I forgot it.”

“ Your degree ! ” cried Helen ; “ you are fortunate, Herbert,” but the two elder women regarded him in silence.

“ Yes, I do not overlook that, Helen ; but

it is just a question whether I shall avail myself of it."

"Not avail yourself of it, Herbert?" here broke in his mother; "not avail yourself of it? And why?"

"Because I intend to enter into the Indian Civil Service."

Herbert had not been used to speak in that incisive way. It was a new revelation of character. Was all confidence over between mother and son? India! was that to be the goal, and were her hopes to be blighted after all?

"I never heard a hint of India before," she remarked, with some asperity.

"I hope you won't go to India. What has made you think of going to India all of a sudden?" asked Mrs. Hazelhurst, inconsiderately.

"I have decided to go into the Indian Civil Service, aunt. Why I do so is only of importance to myself."

"You have come to this decision rather quickly," retorted Mrs. Langridge.

Herbert looked down for a few minutes, and then raising his head he said, without looking at anyone in particular, but as if addressing someone outside that circle —

“ Some decisions in life have to be made quickly ; they are none the less enduring on that account. Yesterday I had no thought of India in my future ; to-day I have.”

“ If you wish to leave early, Herbert,” said the mother, more gently, “ of course I shall travel with you. I am sure that your aunt will make no objection.”

“ None at all ; any hour that you like we can have breakfast.” She was about to say how sorry she was they were leaving, but she was not sorry, and for truth’s sake the words were happily left unsaid.

“ Will you excuse me, ladies ? I have some matters I wish to arrange,” and he rose.

Of course he was excused.

“ How odd, how changed he is ! ” thought Helen. “ Ladies ! ” No, she did not think she could ever have much desired to have Herbert for her lover.

“ This has been a most unfortunate visit.”

“ Do you really think that he will go to India, Elinor ? ”

“ Between now and an appointment in India worthy of his acceptance, there is a long gap to be filled up, and determined as he seems at present, the course of events may be stronger than his will, which seems just now

to be of the strongest. Once quite away from that woman he will breathe a different atmosphere. Should he be besotted enough to cling overlong to his foolish fancy out of pure waywardness, as men do sometimes, it will not then be a bad thing to put the sea between them. Then all will be obliterated, like footmarks on the sands. I must part with him some day," sighed the mother, "why not to India? He is young, and so is Helen, they can both afford to wait—to wait until the years have brought to Herbert wealth and fame, and the awakening sense of Helen's superior claims to his love."

"My Helen is not to be bargained for in this fashion, Elinor. That dream of mine is over. She shall never go to India."

"Nonsense, Kate. She need not go to India—India will come to her in the shape of a wealthy husband."

"Helen will long before that time has arrived have met someone, I opine, who will not have needed such an experience to drive him into loving her. Our bond is at an end. We can neither of us look forward to the union of our children."

"As you please, Kate; perhaps they will

do better without our bond, and fall in love some day with each other in spite of it."

It will thus be seen that whereas formerly Mrs. Langridge had always carried herself towards the projected marriage with a high hand, whilst her step-sister was warmly entertaining the idea; and that now, when Mrs. Hazelhurst professed to have abandoned all her previous long cherished hopes, so did Mrs. Langridge the more strenuously desire that the well-dowered Helen should some day be her son's wife.

" Some day ! " echoed Mrs. Hazelhurst, as they parted for the night.

CHAPTER XV.

Wer nie sein brod mit thränen ass
Wer nie die kummervollen nächte
Auf seinem bette weinend sass
Der kennt euch nicht, ihr himmlischen mächte.

GOETHE.

What could a sillie woman doe but weepe ?

FATHER ROBERT SOUTHWELL.

THE chords lately tightened to high pitch
were now slack, and Mary Myles alone in
her little study was prostrate and nerveless.
It was so short a time since her warm and
enthusiastic but long repressed nature had
given full vent to the expression of life-
renewing feelings.

With her head on her young lover's breast
her heart had told all its tale in those
passionate words, "I have found thee at
last, my life's lord," and now this newly-
found life-in-love was to give way to the

death of separation. When should she look upon him again? As she had not striven to hide her love from him when he had asked her for it, so now she made no effort to cover up and hide from herself the dreary desolation of her heart. They had taken him away; where should she find him again? “What can a sillie woman doe but weepe?” she had cried in the words of the Jesuit Father, as with dishevelled hair and streaming eyes she threw herself on the very ground in her despairing grief. “Let me weep! let me weep!” she cried, again and again, as if expostulating with supreme reason and her religious sense. “Let me weep to-night—to-morrow I may give thee thanks, oh my God, but to-night let me weep in the dust!” And as in her voluntary abasement, she felt the full meaning of the uprooting of many earthly hopes, whilst her cheeks were wet with tears, she groaned, “Oh that I could find a harbour of refuge in some recluse’s cell, where I might weep forgotten and unseen!”

But the day was gone and the night had come, and noiselessly—noiselessly, as messages from the spirit world enter the prepared soul, the moon-rays flooded the room

with silver light, and placidly enfolded the prostrate form of the girl lying on the floor in all the abandonment of undisciplined grief; but the storm winds that had lashed the calm transparent lake into a sea of tossing waves, were subsiding.

Through the temporary hush, as if borne by the midnight breeze that came in through the open casement, the awakening soul heard one word, “Daughter.” The half-rising sob was driven back; half in awe, she held in her breath, and raised herself on one arm, listening. And, again as though in a soft whisper, came to her the appealing word, “Daughter.”

It was enough, she sprang to her feet, and all the sense of miserable failure and the shame of defeat, brought a rush of warm blood in crimson glow to her pale tear-stained cheeks. That noble pride of the woman on which she had ever rested as her sheet-anchor had not availed her in this late assault. “Mother,” she said, softly and humbly, “thy voice has spoken in my heart. I thank Thee, O God, for this Thy message of love,” and she knelt down and bowed her head in prayer. “I thank Thee for this discipline of humiliation.”

The first shrill far-off crow of an audacious bantam, eager to announce the coming of the morn before his larger rival, who triumphed over him daily, solely from the vulgar accessory of size, found her still communing with herself. The very homeliness of this voice in the silence was a means of strength to her, so small are the adjuncts which in some of our exalted or despairing moods, sway our un-hinged souls. Had a nightingale's note thrilled through the stillness, the tender chords might again have been loosened in a fresh overflow of sorrow ; had an owl's screech awoke the night, a dark foreboding of future woes might have been conjured up, but at the cry of a barn-door fowl Mary smiled. How often had she seen the ardent little fellow, tiptoe and eager for combat, blown aside by a gust of wind in the very face of the haughty tyrant whom he was vainly defying, and challenging to mortal combat ? Yes, Mary smiled. "Surely," she said, "it is in mockery of my egoistic claims to superiority, that my recall to the duties and labour of life is thus delivered by the humble denizen of the poultry yard." But the day came back at last, and the moon stole away, covering herself with a filmy mantle at the

coming of the sun, whose messengers of ruddy clouds were like the torch-bearers who herald the approach of majesty. On the table stood the untasted meal of last evening, which she had ordered to be set forth in her study. No one had appeared to remove it. Was she already of so little consequence ?

On the window sill was a blue vase, and within it were two or three of those same marygolds which she had offered to her lover. These were some which had lodged in the folds of her gown when she had let them all escape from her grasp beneath her lover's embrace, and which, when she had found them afterwards, she had transferred to this vase.

“How cheerful they look,” she cried, “as fresh as when they were first gathered—hardy, brave, steadfast flowers ! I am glad that he chose them ; how would roses have looked now ?” and she stooped her head down to them and kissed them ; they were wet with night dews, and they left a moisture on her lips. “I have kissed away your tears,” she whispered, “so will perfect love kiss away all sorrow.”

Coming out from her bedchamber one hour afterwards she found Helen in her dressing-gown and slippers, waiting at the door. The girl said nothing, but with a cry of joy rushed to her, and flinging her arms around her burst into tears.

“I have been going backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, all through the night,” she whispered. “I thought that you must be dead, for I could not hear a breath, and there was no answer, although I knocked several times.”

“I was not there, darling,” said Mary, taking Helen’s face between her two palms and looking at her; “but you look ill and wretched. Go, child, and get an hour’s slumber in peace. See, I am well ! ”

“And Gibson tells me that you ate no dinner last night, and that you have not been to bed, and yet you look —”

“A little cold water does much, darling, and, upon second thoughts, I advise you to have a good sprinkling of it at once, and then come and join me in a cup of tea, which I am now going to make; it will do you more good than to lie down now that the sun is high. Will you come, dear ? ”

Helen smiled through her tears.

“I shall like it much. Poor Gibson is fretting terribly.”

“Ask Gibson to leave off fretting; and if she will kindly remove the untouched feast and place a few teacups and biscuits in its stead, I shall be very much obliged. By the time you are freshened up I shall have prepared our early breakfast.”

Few words were spoken at the light meal, but those few were words of gratitude and love.

“Dearest Polly,” cried Helen, as she rose to go in order to complete her toilet (being sufficiently reassured to be able to adopt her old familiar epithets), “you are a marvel to me; you do not seem as if—as if—”

“As if what, Helen?”

Helen blushed.

“Well, as if you had been awake all night.”

Mary smiled at the evasion.

“Just one word, Helen. As I cannot leave before to-morrow, I should like to spend this last day at the Vicarage, that is, with Mrs. Hazelhurst’s permission. I think that will be the best plan for us all.”

“Reginald is expected home to-day,” stammered Helen.

“And what if Reginald be expected home to-day?” asked Mary, bending quiet, earnest eyes on Helen’s face.

“Oh! I hardly know—only that I thought—”

“You have been thinking overmuch lately, Helen, I suspect, upon matters that have been, and are, outside your powers of control,” she added, gravely.

“If I have caused you any annoyance, dear aunt, forgive me.” As her nephew said this he raised Mrs. Hazelhurst’s hand to his lips, but as quickly resigning it, he took her in his arms and kissed her. “Too formal a leave-taking for a long good-bye,” he whispered.

“Dear Cousin Helen, have no fear of your pony; he has no vice—none. Good-bye, dear; thank you for all kindness,” and so Helen received his unwonted salutation of being kissed on both cheeks without any maidenly tremor of surprise. It might have been the kiss of a father or uncle, so grave an impress was set upon that face of his, from which all youth seemed to have died out in one night. He had become so old, as Helen said.

He had handed his mother into the car-

riage and was about to follow her when a sudden memory came to him. He looked at his watch ; it was too late to return to the house.

“Have you forgotten anything, Cousin Herbert ?”

“Yes,” he answered, and he whispered a few words in Helen’s ear.

As the carriage wheeled round and passed those windows, before which he had paced the livelong night, he did not turn his head, but he thought to himself, “Loving eyes are looking upon me in my anguish.”

He was mistaken. The woman he loved was on her knees with her face buried in her hands. She had said, “I will not trust myself to look upon his face again.”

CHAPTER XVI.

So in all this
We miscall grief, bale, sorrow, heartbreak, woe,
What is there to plain of.

ALPHONSUS DE LIGUORI.

WITH basket on arm, Mary, an hour later, set out to walk towards the Vicarage. She was closely veiled, for she cared not that curious eyes should detect that she had been weeping. Had the news already flown before her? the tale of that quickly-wrought love and its sudden catastrophe? She felt as if the ashes of abasement were sprinkled over her head in the sight of every one, and was she to meet the boy-lover in her old pupil thus?—she, to whom so often had been offered the crown of love, and who had put it aside with indifference, and now to be contemned as unworthy?

Not yet had she risen to those sunlit heights which await the toiler climbing the flint-strewn paths of self-renunciation. It was all too soon as yet, whilst the sounds of those departing carriage wheels seemed to be still vibrating and wounding her ears with their discordant grating.

“Unhappy mother !” she said, bitterly, “you have spurned me, and you have lost a son’s best love. You will know it on the day when you discover that there is a void in your heart, notwithstanding what you willed has been obeyed to the letter.”

When duty and love walk side by side, the path, however long, is always aglow with the sunlight of golden noontide, with the flutter and songs of birds, and the glory of wide-open flowers; but to travel the road of duty divorced from love, is like a pacing of the sands in twilight when the sea is low and the darkened waves give a hollow sound. Heavily cast down as she was, the victory of a perfect uniformity with the will of God which she desired was near. In exceeding bitterness of soul she had cried out in the spirit of St. Augustine, “Not yet, not yet.” But she wrestled no longer in vain; the

triumph was at hand when she could think of her lover's mother with sorrow and pity rather than with anger.

"To-day be Thy will accomplished in me," she murmured. "This earthly love shall be consecrated to Thee and laid upon Thine altar—not thrust aside or annihilated, but united to the divine love, and made one with it."

A robin, gay and intrepid in heart, with no lament because summer days were nearly over, and autumn blasts and winter snows were impending, trolled out its brief refrain above her with exceeding joy. Her eyes had hitherto been bent on the ground, but she now raised her heavy lids, for the little bird's cheerful notes sounded to her as if it were a messenger from the spirit of Nature; and for the first time she noticed how heavy laden with blossoms was the hedge row, whilst her basket hung empty upon her arm. Responsive to these messages from the external world she stopped, and, placing her basket on the ground, raised up both arms to gather a long trail of "Travellers' joy." A sound as of a quick footstep approaching arrested her; and at the same moment the

Vicar, opening the gate of an adjoining field, appeared before her.

“I did not expect to meet you here, my dear,” he said, kindly, as he seized both her hands and shook them warmly.

This unusually familiar greeting and the Vicar’s manner told her that he knew all.

“I am going to ask Mrs. Ashcroft to take me in for the day,” she answered, “my last day at Sunnyside.”

“And I am going over to Sunnyside now to see Mrs. Hazelhurst, and, it maybe, to expostulate with Mrs. Langridge, her sister.”

“Upon what subject?” asked Mary, quietly.

“Oh, my dear, use no reserve with an old man, a priest and a father. I received a note from Mrs. Hazelhurst last evening. It was not like her; her sister’s influence was in it. I was much surprised at the subject of it; but why should I have been surprised?” and the Vicar hesitated as he looked at her. “I ought not to have been surprised, except at the wording of that communication.”

“Now, as you have met me, there is no need to go.”

“Why not? Indeed, but there is. I could not allow such a note to pass unquestioned, and I might, perhaps, be able to influence Mrs. Langridge herself.”

“Mrs. Langridge and her son both left Sunnyside early this morning.”

“Left Sunnyside? Then I am too late?”

“Not too late to take me back with you. Let us walk to the Vicarage together.”

“No, no, my dear. If Mrs Langridge has left I have at least a duty as a Christian priest to perform as regards Mrs. Hazelhurst.”

“Dear Mr. Ashcroft,” said Mary, softly, “I want no intercessor here. Turn back, dear friend, and the rather plead my cause with Mrs. Ashcroft that, unannounced, I may yet hope that she will receive me this last day.”

As he looked into her true face, where a smile was struggling to the surface, he thought, “If it could only have been Reginald!” and he suffered her to link her arm in his, and they walked along in silence.

“I wished,” she said, after a short pause, pointing to the empty basket which she had reslung upon her arm, “to have decked your

table with wild flowers for one time more. But, perhaps, it is well as it is; when I looked upon them they would have seemed like the flowers that clothe a recent grave. Do not fear," she whispered, as upon reaching the Vicarage she laid her head for a moment upon the shoulder of sympathetic Mrs. Ashcroft, who had begun to weep; "I am not bringing you a broken heart, nor wounds which I am asking you to bind."

Mr. Ashcroft, after depositing his companion with his kind wife, who felt a thrill of youthful emotion and interest in this unexpected episode of romance breaking through the monotony of her calm uneventful life, set out to meet Reginald at the railway station.

After warm greetings between father and son, Mr. Ashcroft said —

"You will be glad to hear that we have Miss Myles with us for the day."

His father did not notice a greater accession of colour to the usually florid hues of his son's face.

"Indeed! I shall be glad to see her."

"We have been lately in one influx of

excitement after another," continued the father, "on account of Miss Myles, poor girl. We are really quite upset by it just now ; no sooner have we got over one surprise but there comes another."

"Why, what's the matter now?" said Reginald, turning aside to tear off a hazel rod, which he forthwith began to peel.

"Well, your mother told you all about my dear old friend's disappointment and his illness, and how it is that we have lost him from among us."

"Yes," said Reginald, continuing to peel.

"Wasn't that all sad enough?"

"Yes," said Reginald, absently.

"Young men have no sympathy with old men's heart troubles," said Mr. Ashcroft, somewhat sadly.

"Perhaps not."

Reginald, as he said this, threw away his half-peeled stick, which had revealed a hidden scar, and was about to select another.

"So Miss Myles is at home, is she?" he said, almost in soliloquy, as he tore down the chosen one with a sharp crack.

"Yes, poor girl! poor girl!"

"What ever do you say 'poor girl' for,

father? I don't know anyone to whom that epithet is more misapplied. Surely you don't call her 'poor girl' because she failed to appreciate dear old Grantham?"

"No, worse than that; worse than that."

Reginald, with penknife in one hand and rod in the other, turned quickly round.

"What ever do you mean, father?"

"You'll be sure to hear all about it, and so I'd better tell you at once, and then you'll not stumble on to awkward ground. The fact is, that your old friend, Herbert Langridge, and Miss Myles have had a most determined love affair, and that it has been cancelled and brought to an end by the mother and aunt in the most summary and harshest way possible; of course, there was some little justification on their side, as it was indiscreet in the young people. The two women wanted him for Helen, and that complicated matters and made their wrath more terrible; but I am very much grieved Miss Myles is leaving Sunnyside to-morrow, so you'll be cautious in talking with her. There, that's all; and enough, too, poor girl!"

The hazel stick and the penknife had both

fallen to the ground. Reginald stooped to pick them up.

“ Well,” said the Vicar, in amazement, “ have you nothing to say upon it ? ”

“ I wish you had told me of it before.”

“ How could I tell you before, Reginald, when I did not know it until last night ? ”

Reginald thrust his hands into his pockets.

“ I’ve not seen Miss Myles for over four years,” he said, moodily.

“ The more shame for you, you owe more to her than to anyone. She, girl as she was, gave you your first impulse to work—made you what you are. What were you before ? ”

“ A numskull, as I am now.”

“ I cannot think,” said Mr. Ashcroft, disregarding this irrelevant comment on his present self, “ and your mother and myself have often talked it over, what cause for quarrel or dislike you could have against Miss Myles. It has annoyed us at times very much. Something estranged you, that’s quite certain, but how anyone with a grain of sense—well, well—we have tried to show our gratitude if you have failed to do so.”

Mr. Ashcroft spoke angrily.

The young man put his hand upon his father's arm.

"Miss Myles performed miracles with a stupid pupil. She was very kind—too kind—she even loved me as if I had been her younger brother." He paused. "But, you see, father, boy as I was, I wanted something more."

"Something more! What could you have more?"

"Bless me, father!" cried Reginald, letting fall his father's arm, "do you think that old Dr. Grantham and Herbert Langridge are the only beings on earth likely to fall in love with Miss Myles?"

Mr. Ashcroft looked at his son for a few moments vaguely, as though he did not comprehend his words, and both were silent. At last the truth burst upon him.

"My poor boy!" he cried.

"I don't think, after all, that I need very much pity," he began again, in slow, measured tones, after they had gone on a few yards side by side without speaking. "It's quite certain that if I had not fallen head over ears in love I should have been only fit to be shipped off with other failures

to the far end of the world, out of sight ; for, of course, I should have been of no more worth at the Antipodes than here, only I should have been out of sight, which is a great boon to the relatives of a ne'er-do-well. I believe that laziness is an inherent part of my constitution. I always envy people who can lie in the sun all day and feed upon bananas, so that it's quite evident to me that I should have enrolled myself in the great army of the 'no wish to be employed' ones, to the great comfort of father, mother, and brothers, if you, in a fortunate moment, had not thought of a feminine teacher who happily turned out to be young and lovely. How you came to do it, my dear father, is beyond me. You are generally cautious, but it was an inspiration ! If it were not that I still feel her a power over me—I believe that I should even now sink into the deep slough of sloth."

"What are you talking about, Reginald ? "

"Don't be afraid—don't be afraid—my good old father, I'm all right. I could not become an idle vagabond now—because of her. I wanted more of her than I had any right to expect after receiving so much ; but

never mind, I shall now go in for being an old bachelor, and will dream over my delusion in my leisure moments while indulging a whiff in a comfortable easy chair in some snug rectory. No, don't call me 'poor boy.' I was a bit down just now, because when I heard that she would have none of Dr. Grantham—I thought, well, I felt almost sure that she was thinking of me, and that if I asked her again—silly, vain fool! But 'tis over—say nothing to my mother, and never think or speak of it again. Now, before we go in, let us have a good long walk together, father, and that will put me all right again."

The rather thick-set and robust figure of Reginald Ashcroft, with his ruddy, healthy face, and fair closely cropped hair, showed a type of development more physical than intellectual; but, nevertheless, there were some signs of capability and resolution in head and brow which counteracted a certain heaviness in the lower features. He was altogether in strong contrast to the high and refined style of feminine beauty impersonated in Miss Myles, who at this moment was more etherealized than ever by her extreme pallor

and by her heavy lids, and the violet shadows beneath. Their opposites in the female sex have generally an attraction for men, and no two people could be more unlike in appearance than those two, who were now exchanging greetings at the Vicarage. For a few moments Reginald, seemingly absorbed and absently gazing into Miss Myles' face, retained the hand she gave, but, recovering himself with a slight start, he dropped it suddenly, and concealed the sigh which involuntarily rose by taking a long inspiration which was an attempt to show that he was merely out of breath in consequence of having walked quickly, and said, as he turned to his mother again —

“ We were sadly afraid that we should be keeping you without your luncheon a shamefully long time, and so we hastened our pace over-much. We have had a splendid walk all over the hills. I never enjoyed a walk so much in all my life.”

“ You are really a very cool fellow, Reggie,” said the fond mother, “ to go for a long walk before coming home. And your father, too ; how did you manage to decoy him who had already had rather a long one ? ”

Mr. Ashcroft patted his wife on the shoulder.

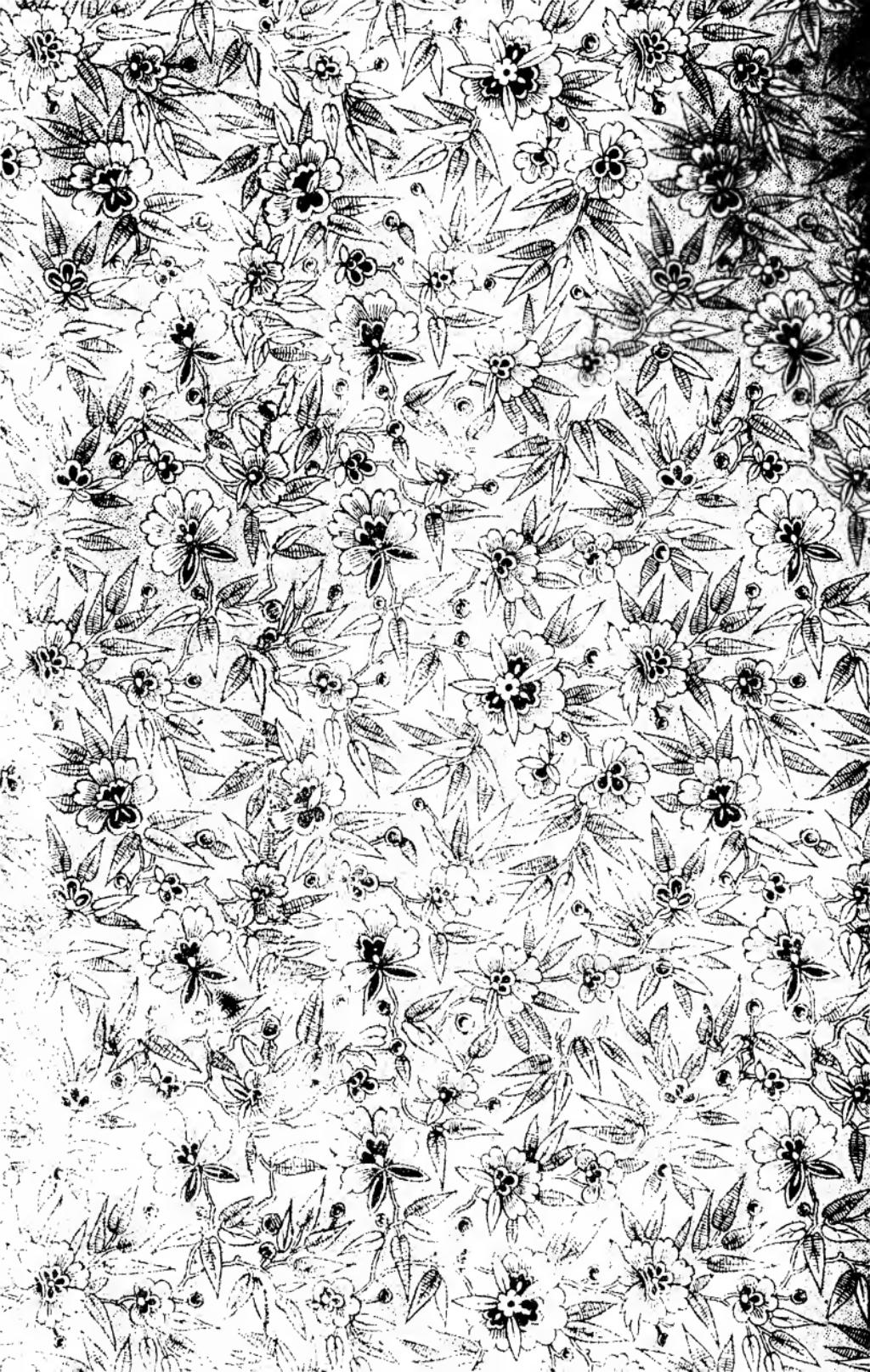
“We are here at last, my dear. We are late, and we are dusty. Give us leave to absent ourselves for a wash and brush up, and reserve your scolding till after luncheon, for we are also—hungry.”

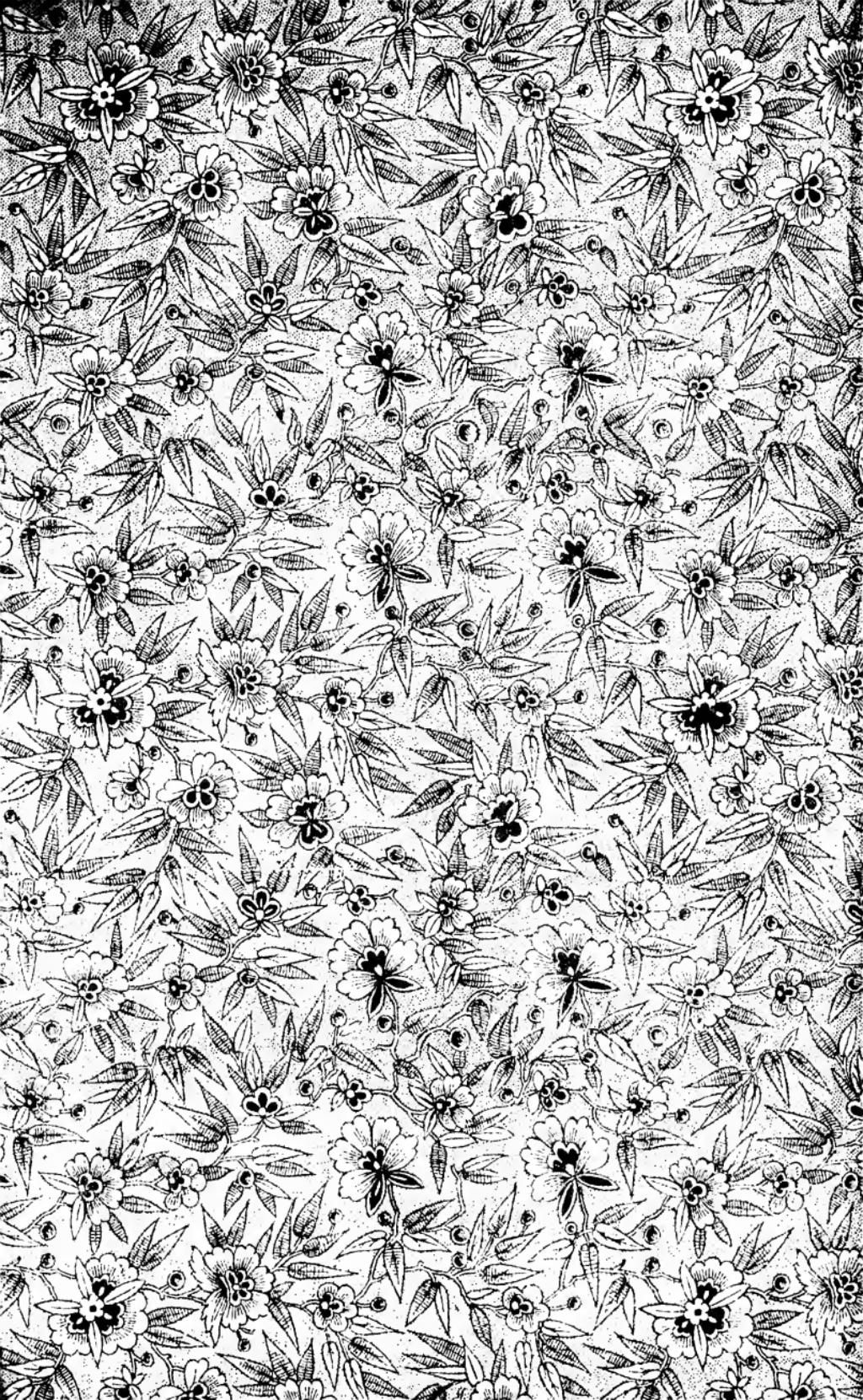
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